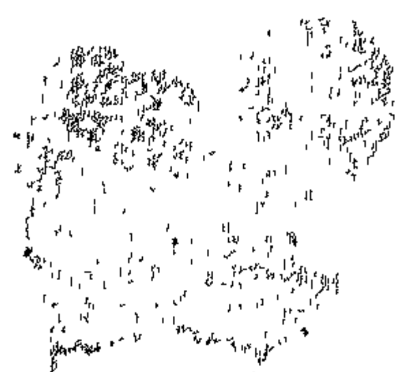
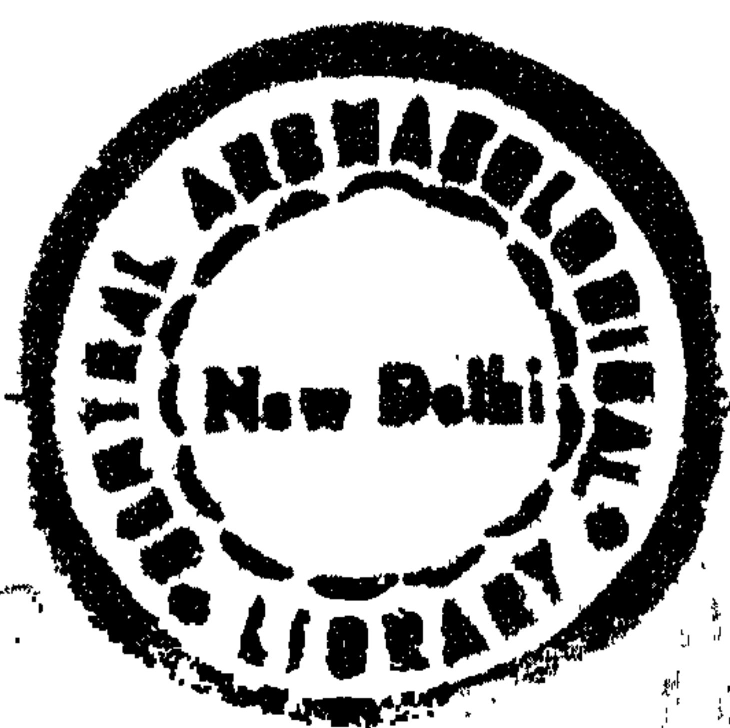


GUPTA CIVILIZATION: A STUDY

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Late Dharanidhar Maity

And

Late Amarendra Nath Maji.

Author's Works

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Early Indian Coins and Currency System.
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CONTENTS

PREFACE

Originally prepared for the benifit of my Post-graduate and research students, the present study in its final form has covered a much wider ground. The complexities of early Indian socio-religious life and culture often present a baffling picture for the Indians themselves. Thus, the predicament of others is easily understandable. I have attempted to present a clear but authentic account of the various facts of life in the Gupta Age. But in some cases I have pointed out how a remarkable piece of painting or sculpture gives the historian as well as a casual on-looker an insight into the life and culture of a particular age in ancient India. For instance, two pieces of sculpture in Mahābalipuram depicts the marriage ceremony of Hara and Pārvatī, Menokā holds the hands of Pārvatī along with Daksha and Brahmā, as priest, is present there to solemnise the marriage. A few attendents are also present there. In the next panel Hara tenderly holds the hand of Pārvatī (his wife) immediately after the marriage has been solamnised for the retiring room. These are the unique and fascinating picture of a Hindu marriage ceremony engraved on stone. There are numerous such pieces of painting and sculpture literally strewn all over the country. The chapter on art and culture evaluates the worth of this treasure in Indian history. A chapter on education and learning has highlighted the teacher-student relationship of the period under review. The system of coinage and the significance of coins in evaluating socio-cultural life of the period under review has also been discussed separately.

I am very deeply indebted to Professors Dinesh Chandra Sircar, Benoy Chandra Sen, S. K. Saraswati, Anil Chandra Banerjee, Ramaranjan Mukherji, Ramsharan Sharma, Nemai Sadhan Bose, Amitava Mukherji and others for their suggestions and encouragement. I am further indebted to Sri Amal Sen

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Jadavpur University,
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S. K. Maity

Chapter—I

THE AGE OF THE GREAT KUSHĀṆAS AND THEIR CULTURAL LEGACY.

About 78 A. D. the Kushāṇas, a horde of Central Asian tribes, overthrew the Indo-Pārthian empire and established themselves "as lords of an empire extending from Lake Aral to China and most of Northern and Central India". Their first princes, Kujala Kadphises I and Vima Kadphises II, had been rather "uncouth barbarians". But in the second century, under Kaṇishka, the Great, and his successors, Huvishka and Vāsudeva, the Kushāṇa empire became a first-rank political and cultural power.

GENERAL PROSPERITY :

The empire of the Kushāṇas proved a great civilizing factor and opened the way for Indian civilization to Central and Eastern Asia. Trade and commerce flowed through India, Persia, Mesopatamia, China and the Roman Empire. The Kushāṇa ambassadors were despatched to the great Roman Emperors. The sea-borne trade of India was carried, under the Kushāṇas, through the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. Indian goods were carried through these two channels to Egypt and the Roman Empire. Indian silk pieces, pearls and other articles of eastern luxury were in great demand by the Roman nobility. In payment of these articles, quantities of Roman gold coins poured into India so much so that a Roman writer, Pliny, in a patriotic vein lamented the flow of gold from his country to India.

As all the great trade routes (silks, gold and spices) of Asia, from China and India to Iran and Rome, passed through the Kushāṇa territories, the commercial towns grew rich and quickly

recovered from all political crises. Though the local culture in Khorezm (Khewa), Sogdia and Bactria was Iranian, in Afghanistan predominently Hellenistic and in the Indian, a cultural mixture was unavoidable and proved highly fruitful.

THEIR COINS :

The Kushāṇa coins best mirror this synchronism. They were generally modelled on those of the Roman Empire, retaining however, Indo-Greek, Graeco-Bactrian and Parshian motifs, and evolving new Zoroastrian and Indian features. On the obverse side, the head, bust or whole figure of the emperor is represented, standing, or sitting with crossed legs on a couch, in thick riding boots, wide, sagging trousers, a long stiff overcoat, with a pointed Scyshian cap or mitre on his head, armed with spear, mace or bow or holding a sceptre. A halo surrounds his head, and flames issue from his shoulders ; for the emperors were regarded as *daivaputras* (sons of the gods). But on the reverse side a pantheon of Greek, Iranian and Indian gods appears in amazing confusion. There are still a few Greek names and figures,—Zeus, Heracles, Helios, Hephaistos, Sarapis, Selene ; but their very selection proves that they stand for indigenous deities. The Indian gods are not numerous,—Buddha, Skanda and Śiva.

RELIGION : (a) *BUDDHISM*

The Kushāṇas made a very valued contribution in the domain of Buddhism ; and Buddhism was raised to the status of a world religion during their reign. In the Buddhist Church there was no central co-ordinating authorities : as a result no less than 18 different sects had grown up by the time of Kaṇishka. At the advice of Pārśva (or Pārśvika) Kaṇishka had convoked a great Buddhist Council in Kashmir (or Gandhāra). The Buddhist Church was divided into two big camps, viz, Hinayāna and Mahāyana ; the former was the original Buddhism and the latter was the new school of Buddhism.

According to Hinayāna, a man himself had to strive for his salvation and must make himself holy. He should neither pray to God or gods, nor depend upon Him for deliverance from sin, nor offer prayers to Lord Buddha. But the new creed Mahāyana elevated Buddha from his position of a teacher to that of God or the King of gods. Buddhism, thus, under the Kushāṇas became theistic. The images of the Buddha were made and placed in monasteries, temples and prayers for salvation and forgiveness of sins were offered to him by the people. In addition to Lord Buddha, worship and prayers were also offered to Bodhisattvas, the holy saints who were in the process of obtaining Buddha-hood. Thus, the images of the Bodhisattvas with those of Buddha were also made and worshipped. On the other hand, the Hinayāna school instead of making images of Buddha, represented him only by symbols, e.g., an empty seat or a pair of foot-prints. Moreover, the doctrine of Bodhisattvas led to a new belief that anyone might aim at or were rise to the Buddha-hood for assisting men in obtaining salvation. On the contrary, Hinayāna mentions that each has to strive for his or her salvation without the assistance of a God or saint. Thus, the Mahāyānist believed in the divinity of the Buddha, in the efficacy of prayer, faith and devotion to a personal saviour. It began to follow the Hindu idea of Yoga, the practice of which was supposed to lead to spiritual insight. The exposition and preaching of the Hindu doctrine of Bhakti (or devotion) had some effect on the new form of Buddhism. The Bhakti cult imposed upon its followers a single-minded devotion and intense attachment to the object of their worship and inspired the devotees with the feelings of warmth and emotion. All these were absent in the orthodox Buddhism. Hinayānism was unprogressive, cold, intellectual inart and rather monotonous. In short, Mahāyānism was an intensely living and active faith and infused a new life in the old Buddhism. Thus, in the Kushāṇa Age, Buddhism, under its new form, spread rapidly to many countries, such as, Burma, Siam, Malay Peninsula, China, Japan etc.

(b) *OTHER FORMS OF RELIGION* :

From the study of their coins it can also be suggested that they worshipped Greek, Sumerian, Elamite, Persian and Indian deities. Among them mention may be made of Aesho (Śiva), Sakaymo Boddo (Śākyamuni Buddha), the wind god Oads (Persian Vādo, Indian Vāta), the fire-god Athsho (Persian Atash), the moon-god Mao, the sun-god Méiro or Miuro or Mioro) (Persian Mithra, Mihr ; Indian Mitra (or Mihira), Sumerian mother goddess Nana, Nanaia or Nana-Shao (Bibi Nānī of Baluchistan and Nainā Devī of the Kulu Valley), the war-god Orlango (Persian Bahram), the fire-god Pharro (Persian Farr), the sun-god Helios (Greek), Roma, the goddess of abundance Ardoksho, Indian gods Ooshna (Vishṇu), Mahāsena, Skanda, Kumāra Viśākha and Lakshmī. Among the above gods and goddesses Kaṇishka's coins contain large number of Greek, Zoroastrian, Elamite and Hindu gods. Images of the Buddha also appear on some of them. It might be the fact that like Akbar, the great Mughal, Kaṇishka followed a policy of "*Sulhi-Kul*" (Toleration of all sects) and tried to win the sympathy and support of all denominations for the sake of his vast empire. Probably he adopted Buddhism late in life, for his Peshwar casket inscription of his late period records him as a Buddhist.

THE GANDHĀRA SCHOOL OF ART :

The art of Gandhāra is properly speaking, the official art of the Kushāṇa Emperor Kaṇishka and his successors. The "Gandhara art" is applied to this school of architecture, sculpture, and painting, which flourished in north-western India from the first century B.C. to the fifth century A.D. This designation comes from the ancient name of the region, and is to be referred to as Greco-Buddhist, i.e., the forms and the styles of Greek art are applied to Buddhist subjects. The earlier Buddhist sculptor disliked idolatory and hence indicated the presence of the Buddha only by such signs as the foot-marks, wheel or umbrella. But the artists of this school

adopted the novel method of representing him as a human being and carved full stone images of him surrounded by the Bodhisattvas. These images resemble strikingly those of the Greek gods. Thus, "images of the Buddha appear in the likeness of Apollo, the Yaksha ; Kuvera is posed in the fashion of the Phidian Zeus, so on". As a matter of fact the Gandhāra sculptures are lively artistic expressions of the Mahāyāṇa form of Buddhism which regards the Buddha as a god attended by a heirarchy of other beings "acting as mediators between him and sinful men". Outside India Gandhāra art became the parent art of Eastern Turkistan, Mongolia, China, Korea and Japan. Kaṇishka also built many Buddhist *stupas* and *bihāras* ; and in Kashmir he also founded a city called Kaṇishkapura.

INTELLECTUAL AND LITERARY ACTIVITIES :

The Kushāṇa period is very important from the literary and intellectual point of view. Among the Kushāṇas, Kaṇishka was a liberal patron of art and learning. Celebrated scholars like, Parsava, Vasumitra, Aśvaghosha, Charaka, and Nāgārjuna adorned his court. Most famous among them was Aśvaghosha. In the opinion of Prof. S. Levi, "he stands at the starting point of all the great currents that renewed and transformed India towards the beginning of the Christian era. Poet, musician, preacher, moralist, philosopher, playwright, tale-teller, he is an inventor in all these arts, and excels in all ; in his richness and variety he recalls Milton, Goethe, Kant and Voltaire". His Buddhacharita and Sutrālaṅkāra are imperishable testimony to his scholarship and genius.

Next to Aśvaghosha stands Nāgārjuna. He is said to be the author of the 'Śatasahasrika-Prajñā Pāramita', one of the earliest Mahāyāna-Sutras. He is also the author of Madhyamikasutras and the founder of the Mādhyamika school which teaches that the whole of the phenomenal world is a mere illusion. Vasumitra is the author of Mahāvidhasha Śāstra which is an encyclopaedia of Buddhist Philosophy. Charaka,

the greatest authority on the Āyurveda system of medicine and surgery, is said to have been the court physician of Kaṇishka.

It is also interesting to note that the proceedings of the great Buddhist Council convoked by Kaṇishka were recorded in Sanskrit. "This introduction of the use of Sanskrit as the lingua-franca is a turning point in the mental history of the Indian people. The causes that preceded it, the changes in the intellectual stand point that went with it, the results that followed on both, are each of them of vital importance", says Dr. Rhys David. Thus, the Kushāṇa period witnessed important developments in religion, literature and sculpture, especially the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Gandhāra art, and the appearance of the Buddha figure in art. In the establishment of a vast empire and the revival of imperial tradition, in the extensive intellectual activities, in the cultivation and the rise of distinctive schools of art and in the dissemination and transformation of Buddhism, the Kushāṇa Age occupies an important chapter in the civilization of ancient India.

But after Vāsudeva the Kushāṇa empire broke up into small principalities. Ultimately the Nāgas supplanted their power in India whereas the Sassanians ousted them from Bactria and Sisthan. Some of the petty Kushāṇa princes continued to exist in North-Western borderland of the sub-continent. Samudragupta of the Gupta dynasty is said to have forced them to acknowledge his suzerainty. They were, however, finally overthrown by the Hūṇas and later on by the Śāhi kings of the Punjab. Again, the political disintegration continued unabated in northern India. But with the rise of the Guptas in the beginning of the fourth century A.D., the picture changed and a new era of peace and progress set in. The early Gupta rulers made extensive conquests, unified the greater part of the sub-continent under their Imperial sceptre and embarked the country upon an age of material, moral, intellectual and cultural attainment unrivalled in any age of her ancient history.

Chapter—II

ART AND CULTURE

The age of the Imperial Guptas of Pāṭaliputra extending over the fourth, fifth and early sixth centuries A.D., was certainly the Golden Age of Indian history in the same sense as the Victorian and Elizabethian. It was an age of magnificence and greatness—a period of feverish political activity, of brilliant military exploits, of glorious contributions in the fields of art and culture. It was an era of prodegies and geniuses, one, which could well be compared with the Golden Age of Pericles. It was in all respects the Classical Age of India which saw the emergence of all the fundamental traits of the present Indian culture and tradition.

It was, however, in the field of art that the Guptas excelled the most. The period witnessed a tremendous outflow of creative artistic genius resulting in great architectural feats, exquisite sculptures and fabulous paintings. Even the folk art of the period has a brilliance of its own. Artistic achievements reached a standard which has never been equalled or surpassed in any subsequent period.

Gupta art was the outcome of a steady uninterrupted growth and is remarkable for its vigorous style, universal appeal and spontaneous development. It is neither wholly Indian nor entirely foreign in its style and influence. It is in essence a synthesis of the indigenous and foreign traditions and techniques. The Gupta artists were fortunate in that they inherited two parallel traditions, each rich and brilliant in its own way. It was in their creations that the two traditions for the first time mingled with one another to evolve a style which served as an ideal to generations of future artists.

It has often been claimed by many art critics that the Gupta age witnessed a renaissance, a rebirth, of the traditional Indian artistic style. No claim can be more unfortunate and erroneous. There was no renaissance in the Gupta period at all. No dark age preceded this period and nothing had lain buried which had to be revived. On the contrary, the age of the Imperial Guptas was one of fulfilment. It witnessed the climax of an art tradition which had a smooth undisturbed growth ever since the days of the Indus civilization and the Ṛig Veda.

At first the artists were allowed a great deal of freedom in their expressions. But by the time the Guptas came to rule in Magadha a great deal of this freedom had gone. A definite science of art and art techniques ((*Śilpa-Śāstra*) had already developed with its rigid rules and regulations. Definite styles were prescribed for the minutest details. Different moods had different modes of expression and the artists were required to adhere to these rules as closely as possible. They were given a steel frame to work in and within the bounds they were required to express their boundless imagination in an infinite variety of amazing and astonishing forms. This they did with admirable skill and meticulous precision.

This great efflorescence of art would not have been possible without the degree of political stability and economic affluence witnessed in the Gupta period. For nearly two centuries the whole of Northern India was under one single authority with a uniform administrative system. The Vākāṭakas of the Deccan and the Eastern coastal kingdoms down the peninsula were long under the influence of the Guptas. Peace and tranquility prevailed over vast stretches of the empire which resulted in an easy flow of trade and commerce. Merchants from far off China and the Mediterranean ports came to exchange their wares in return of Indian goods. The writing of the Classical writers and the large number of Gupta gold coins prove that the trade balance was definitely in India's favour. The economic well-being which resulted from favourable trade together with

political security definitely encouraged the people to cultivate their artistic talents to the full.

Moreover the Gupta emperors were themselves great patrons of art. Many of them were poets and musicians and greatly encouraged the development of art and culture. Thus encouraged by their Imperial patrons, ensured by political and economic stability, enriched by a glorious tradition the Gupta artists evolved a style remarkable for its richness, depth, beauty and variety.

ARCHITECTURE :

Architecture of the early Gupta period was in no way very much different from that of the immediately preceding centuries. Stupas and caves continued to be built and excavated, though temples of stone were being constructed for the first time. With the passing of time and decline in Buddhist influence, however, greater emphasis was laid on temple construction. The later part of the Gupta age witnessed an astonishingly rapid development of temple styles and technique culminating in the *Śikhara* type of the Mahābodhi temple of Bodh-Gayā. This style, however, had its fullest development in the South Indian temples of the Chālukya-Pallava era.

CAVE ARCHITECTURE :

A large number of caves were excavated in Western India during the Gupta age. They served as places of worship not only for the Buddhist monks but for the Brāhmaṇa and Jaina ascetics as well. The continuity of this particular form of architecture may be explained by the fact that there was a long familiarity with the method and that no great constructional problems were involved. Moreover, these proved to be more lasting and suitable to the hilly country. These caves are situated at Ajantā, Ellora, Aurangabad, Bāgh and Bādāmi. The Buddhist caves are of two types : the Chaitya or the religious hall and the Saṁghārāma (or Vihāra or Monasteries).

Cave XIX at Ajantā is one of the best examples of a Chaitya hall excavated during the Gupta Age. A. K. Coomaraswamy feels that the date of excavation should be placed around 550 A.D. or slightly later though J. Fergusson preferred to push the date a little back to about the middle of the fifth century A.D. The cave belongs to the same group as the Caves XVI and XVII both of which were gifts of a minister and a feudatory of the Vākāṭaka King Harisena.

The cave itself retains the plan of the earlier phototypes (Caves IX and X) but with extensive changes in the ornamentation of the facade and the designs of the interior. It consists of a rectangular hall with apsidal back, divided into a nave and side-aisles by richly ornamented fluted pillars with pot and foliage capitals, and massive decorated rounded brackets supporting a broad and elaborate triforium. The carvings on the brackets and the triforium have a regularity and rhythm which inspires in the mind of even a casual observer a sense of astonishment and awe. Over the triforium rises the vaulted roof repeating the wooden ribs in stone.

The votive stupa is situated on an elevated square platform at the apsidal end of the hall. Over the base and separated from it by mouldings rises the drum of the stupa with the standing figure of Buddha in high relief within an arched niche in front. The niche itself is separated from the rest of the stupa by elaborate mouldings of the highest quality. The square *harmikā* with a projection in the middle of each face, end in an inverted pyramid formed of a series of steps. Above it is placed the round shaft of the *chhatrāvali* consisting of three concentric disks placed one above the other in receding stages, with a pot as its crowning finale.

Cave XIX, however, is better known for its facade. It appears that originally there was an entrance court with subsidiary chapels at the sides. At present only a shallow porch remains, supported on two elegantly carved fluted pillars with

bell capitals. The usual rail right across the facade is here dispensed with and we have a double-rolled cornice with small *Chaitya* windows in it in relief. Over it is the enormous horse-shoe-shaped Chaitya window standing in broad relief against a many-storied screen. The final screen at the top of facade is at present half in existence. The other half either broke away or was not completed at all. On either side of the window are the enormous figures of Kuvera. There is a profusion of Buddha images in the *Varadahasta-mudrā* and the *Dhyana-mudrā* carved on the facade at different heights and in various proportions. To the left and at right angles to the facade is a sculpture, representing a Nāga-rāja and his wife, which is remarkably vivid and lifelike.

Cave XXVI at Ajantā is another Chaitya cave of this period and follows in general the pattern of Cave XIX. However, the carvings on the walls and the pillars are far richer and minute though possibly lacking the rhythmic balance and proportion of the former. The votive stupa itself is slightly different to the one in Cave XIX, though it has a figure of Buddha carved on it all the same. Buddha is depicted here on the *pralamba-pāda* fashion within an eleborately patterned and exquisitely decorated niche. On the wall of the left aisle there are two sculptural panels which are particularly interesting. One depicts Buddha's *Mahaparinirvāna* and the other the 'Temptation scene'. The execution has been so skilfully done that the figures seem to stand out as living creatures and if closely observed one seems to share their feelings. "They cease to be stone images and turn into living organs depicting the joys and woes of life. The damsels trying to tempt Buddha look truly seductive and vivacious and there is nothing unnatural in their dress, action or posture."

There was in all probability a portico extending right across the width of the hall which could be entered through three door-ways instead of one. The facade almost similar to Cave XIX's is profusely carved with Buddha figures in different

attitudes which are drawn in friezes separated by friezes of dwarfs, kings and queens.

One of the latest Chaitya halls to be excavated during this period was Cave X at Ellora known as the Viśvakarmā Cave. It closely resembles Cave XIX and XXVI at Ajantā though considerably larger in dimensions and with one or two important differences. The internal arrangements are almost similar though the decorative carvings are not as rich and varied. The votive stupa instead of entirely blocking the apsidal end is here relegated to the background by an enormous statue of Buddha seated in the *pralambapāda-āsana* between two attendants. The prominence of the image of Buddha was a clear indication of the shape of things to come. Buddhism was being greatly influenced by the cult of image worship and the use of Chaitya hall was fast outgrowing its utility.

Externally, the cave marked a break from the old. The courtyard so prominent in the two Ajantā caves is almost gone in this case. The facade itself was divided into two parts, the upper-story having a *vārāndāh* supported by a series of pillars with pot and foliage capitals. The rail running right across the facade and dividing the two stories now stands in a mutilated condition though what still remains of the carvings is enough to testify to the skill and craftsmanship of those forgotten artisans and architects of the Classical Age. The enormous horse-shoe shapped *Chaitya* window is here conspicious by its absence. Instead there is a divided window flanked by two niches in which are standing figures of Buddha. The super-structure of the two niches is double-storied with angled *amalakas* and is topped by a *kirtimukha.* The divided window itself has a superstructure which is flanked on either side by groups of flying figures. The rail at the top of the facade, though broken on the left side, is another masterly piece of architecture.

Among the caves excavated in the Gupta period very few were *Chitya* halls and almost all of them were either at Ajantā

or at Ellora. However, the three caves we have considered here are perhaps the best examples of this type, Their architecture is of an outstandingly high quality which inspires in us a feeling of wonder and amazement. The pillars, both within and outside the structures, are particularly beautiful and the carvings on them are remarkably rich and varied. The *chitya* halls, as noted earlier, were places of worship and possibly because of that the facade and the interior were so elaborately decorated with carvings and sculptures. The Vihāras (or Monasteries) were architecturally speaking less elaborate though not necessarily less imposing.

Of the numerous Vihāra caves in Ajantā about twenty belong to the period under review. Of these a selection may be made, when discussing about them, for in basic structure they are almost all alike. The Vihāras being Monasteries had cells, around the main central hall, where the monks lived. As the size of the Vihāras increased, a greater number of pillars were introduced to support the roof of the central hall. Thus, in Cave XI, one of the earliest and smallest types, there are only four pillars, while in Cave IV, one of the largest Vihāras, there are as many as twenty-four pillars.

Cave XI is the earliest Vihāra of this period with a number of cells of irregular shapes arround the central congregational hall. Of the three cells at the far end the central one seems to have been cut through to make room for a sanctuary consisting of a seated figure of Buddha. The exact date of the excavation is uncertain, though c. 400 A.D. would in all probability be not too far off the mark.

The system of having pillars in Vihāras, first introduced in Cave XI, however, took sometime before it was properly adopted and accepted by the architects. A period of hesitation and natural vaccilation seems to have existed and several experiments were undertaken before a proper system was envolved.

Cave VII shows two sets of pillars side by side, while Cave VI has four central pillars with another series all around. Both these arrangements were deemed unsatisfactory and were subsequently rejected, the one for its inappropriatness and lack of cohersion in a square plan and the second for its conjested appearance. These arrangements finally gave way to a harmonious and unified design of a colonnáde on all the four sides of the hall.

Among the remaining Vihāras at Ajantā of this period Caves I, II, XVI and XVII deserve particular mention. Famous for its frescoes Cave I is one of the finest and most handsomely ornamented caves in Ajantā. It has a covered *Vārāndā* in front with six columns and two pilasters. The pair in the middle, originally forming a part of the porch now gone, have like all others square bases and elaborately carved bracket capitals. Among the remaining pillars each pair is different from the other, yet there is a symmetry and organisation "that is astonishing, nay amazing in its effect."

The facade of the *Vihāra* has been marred by the destruction of the porch but it still contains several bands of rich and beautiful carvings. The elaborately yet exquisitely executed friezes depicts scenes from the life of Buddha, elephant fights and hunting expeditions. The *Vihāra* itself is like any other of its kind with a colonnade on all four sides and cells for the monks. Measuring about sixty-four feet square the congregational hall is world famous for its fabulous frescoes.

Cave II is slightly smaller (about forty eight feet square) though almost similar in plan and is characterised by its uniformity and regularity. The congregational hall has twelve massive and elaborately carved pillars which lend magnificence and grace to the whole scene. The walls and the ceiling are profusely carved and painted. There are thirteen cells on the three sides of the hall, the central one on the far side being

used as a shrine. Image worship had become a regular feature of Buddhism and the Buddhist shrines were fast acquiring a Brāhmanical colour. The stupa had completely disappeared and massive images of Buddha had taken their place. The facade outside have some excellent sculptural panels. Cave II is one of the latest Ajantā caves and was excavated arround 600 A.D.

Caves XVI and XVII belong to a slightly earlier period, their date of execution being about 500 A.D. during the reign of the Vākāṭaka King Harisena. The former, consisting of a central hall about sixty-five feet square, follows the usual pattern of the *Vihāra* caves regarding the cells on the side of the wall. However, the recess at the back of the hall has a figure of Buddha in the *pralambapāda-āsana* and *abhaya-mudrā* This cave is remarkable for the great variety and beauty of its pillars which are vertically fluted with rounded capitals. Outside, there is a *Vārāndāh* supported by six octagonal pillars and two richly carved pilasters. The pillars of the Vārāndāh, all of the similar type, have a square thin base above which rises the shaft, octagonal in shape and tapering upwards. The two armed capital is broad with a middle rectangle, the arms carving up to the top. The pilasters are simply marvellous ; fluted, it has garland and floral carvings towards the neck. The capital touches the ceiling in charming, gentle waves.

Cave XVII is very much similar in design though its pillars are almost certainly of a superior quality, giving a more matured and finished impression. Square at the base and at the top the pillars are fluted in the middle ; they look solid and firm yet graceful and elegant, a delightful and vivid mixture of massivity, strength, beauty and charm.

Architecturally speaking Caves XVI and XVII rank with Caves XIX and XXVI as the finest caves excavated at Ajantā. The standard of execution attained here is of the highest type. One has to see to believe the admirable decorations carved on

the stone pillars,—their richness, variety, style and arrangements bewilders an observer as much as it enthrals him. One wonders at the genius of the artisans who built such magnificent with such meticulous care.

Caves IV, XXVII and XXVIII are the other three *Vihāra* caves which may be considered here. The first is one of the largest of its kind at Ajantā, the central hall being about eighty-seven feet square with twenty-eight pillars. The cells of the monastary are in an unfinished state though the walls of the congregational hall and the *Vārāndāh* outside contain beautiful sculptural panels. The pillars too are remarkable for their elegance and refined beauty.

Cave XXVII also a very big *Vihāra,*—about seventy-five feet square with twenty pillars,—is in a very incomplete state. Most of its pillars are unfinished though one pillar with a vase and foliage capital can be seen in its complete form and by all standards it is a magnificent work. Cave XXVIII is chiefly remembered for a sculptured figure of the lotus bearer *Bodhisattva Padmapāni* on its exterior wall. Louis Frederick remarks that the sculpture is "one of the most beautifully expressive pieces of Ajantā carvings. Time has blurred the outlines but the delicacy of the feature and the superhuman calm of the figure is astonishing. The infinite majesty of pose, the execution, the incredibly sensitive expression reflect the high degree of mastery of their subject which the artists of Ajantā had reached".

The *Vihāra* caves at Bāgh in Central India are almost similar in plan and design to the ones at Ajantā, though there are two very important differences. The sanctuaries at the far end of the congregational hall here contain votive *stupas* instead of the Buddha images. Moreover, here an additional complement of pillars have been introduced inside the usual colonnade as additional support, the rock being not sufficiently homogeneous and perfect. In all the nine caves excavated there belong to the period 500-600 A.D.

In style and technique the architecture at Bāgh is definitely inferior to the architecture as Ajantā. The Bāgh caves lack the rhythm, originality and grace of the Ajantā *Vihāras*. Even then mention should be made of Caves II and IV. The former is remarkable for its uniformity and regularity ; with twenty six pillars and twenty three cells it is one of the biggest *Vihāras* excavated during this period. The pillars are on the whole less decorative than those of Ajantā though not necessarily less imposing. Cave IV, also known as the *Raṅgmahal*, is remarkable for its big size, being ninety-six feet square, and for its highly ornate porch which is a piece of excellent craftsmanship. Certain *Vihāras* here are provided with *sālās* (or school rooms) the exact purpose of which is difficult to ascertain. These rooms were probably used as lecture rooms for newly ordained monks.

The *Vihāras* of Aurangabad in their design and decorative embellishments are similar to the latest caves at Ajantā, though being imitations they lack the vigour and strength of an original work. Consequently the motift copied meticulously from Ajantā are lifeless and to some extent mechanical. However, one interesting feature of some of these caves is the introduction of the shrine at the centre of the hall. A. K. Coomaraswamy calls them excavated "*Mandapams*".

Cave III at Aurangabad dating from about the end of the sixth century is a *Vihāra* cave of the usual type in which the sanctuary containing the colossal statue of Buddha is recessed at the back of the hall. There are very unusual groups of male and female figures in full round sculpture, kneeling towards the image, which A. K. Coomaraswamy feels represent the donors. The figures, remarkable for their elaborate nature, he addresses, exhibit a great individuality and characterisation and are justly regarded as the most striking productions of the Aurangabad artists who excelled in figure sculpture which were not only of massive proportions but were also distinguished by a boldness of relief and naturalistic and almost lifelike effect. This cave also

contains the remarkable relief representing the wonderful image of Avalokiteśvara. The Bodhisattva here is surrounded by a host of suppliants suffering from various misfortunes and seeking redress. The sculpture is neat, sensitive and bold but not as beautiful as the "Temptation Scene" of Cave XXVI at Ajantā or for that matter the Bodhisattva Padmapāni of Cave XXVIII at Ajantā.

Cave VII, also a *Vihāra*, belongs to the same period. It is rather unusual and resembles Cave VIII of Ellora to some extent. Instead of the shrine being relegated to a cell recessed at the back of the hall, as is the usual practice, it is here placed at the centre of the hall with a passage for circumambulation around with cells rediating from it. This was imitated in all probability from the Brāhmanical temples and quite unnecessarily too. The Buddhist form of worship does not call for circumambulation so there is no need to have the shrine at the centre of the hall. However, the walls of the cave, as well as the shrine, abound in figure sculpture, all elaborately and skilfully done, and carefully finished. Particular mention must be made of a dancing scene carved inside the shrine proper which in naturalness and ease, in graceful modelling and elegant effect may well be regarded as one of the most significant products of Buddhist art in India.

The remaining caves at Aurangabad conform to one of these two types and are in no way specially interesting. The *Vihāra* caves at Ellora too are in the main like the ones at Bāgh and Ajantā though definitely of a later date. In all there are ten caves here which belong to the period under review. Of these only Caves II and V are of some special interest. The former has a number of excellently carved pillars with vase and foliage capitals. The execution is of an extremely high order and reminds one of the pillars of Caves XIX, XXVI, I and XVI at Ajantā. The latter (Cave V) known as the *Mahanwada* is unique having no parallels in the vast range of cave shrines in India. It forms a class of its own. Of considerable dimensions

(about 117 ft. by 70 ft.) and rectangular in shape, the cave is divided into a nave and aisles by two rows of pillars with the sanctuary cells at the far end. On either side of the hall cells for the monks have been carved out. Along the length of the cave, however, appear two low and narrow platforms parallel to each other, the only instances of which are in the *Durbār* cave at Kanheri. This strange phenomenon has been variously explained by the different art critics. Fergusson believed the cave was a refectory, the platforms being used as tables. Percy Brown, however, thought that the platforms were meant for ritualistic purposes. No satisfactory conclusion can be arrived at though tentatively Brown's view seems to be more plausible.

Cave VIII has the shrine at the middle of the hall instead of being recessed at the back. This was not a new style though it had never been followed anywhere else except in some caves at Aurangabad. No satisfactory explanation has as yet been suggested by the art critics about this development.

As has been noted earlier, Brāmanical caves were excavated during this period though not as many as the Buddhist caves. The Brāhmanical caves of this period are to be found at Udaygiri in Central India and Bādāmi in the Deccan. The Udaygiri caves are not caves strictly speaking for they are partly rock-cut partly stone built. The natural ledges of the rocks have been converted into shrines by adding to it structural porticoes with pillars in front. There was no actual excavation and the shrine was not within a recessed cell inside the rock. Two of these 'Caves' contain inscriptions of the reign of Chandragupta II Vikramāditya (C. 375—415 A.D.) one bearing the date, year 82 of the Gupta Era corresponding to C. 401—402 A.D. As all the 'caves' here represent one movement, they may be dated about the same period in the beginning of the fifth century A.D.

At Bādāmi too natural ledges of the rock have been converted into shrines but the progress made from the Udayagiri

type is considerable. Each of the shrines was probably provided with an open fore-court leading in succession to the pillared *Vārāndāh*, the columned hall and lastly to a small square sanctum cella cut deeply into the rock at the far end. Of these shrine III, a Vaishṇva shrine, is of special importance as it is exactly dated (578 A.D.) and contains some admirable reliefs like those of Visnṇu seated on Ananta and Narasiṃha. The pillars of the Vārāndāh are decorated with triple brackets ornamented with magnificent human figures in the full bloom of Gupta abundance. In general the other caves have a plain and rather simple facade though the interior in every case is rich on account of the varied designs of the pillars and the profusions of sculptures and carvings which appear on all sides.

ŚTUPAS :

The stupa, originally a funeral mound, became the symbol of the last great event of the Buddha's life, viz., the *Parinirvāna*. It usually enshrined the relics of Gautama Buddha, and in some rare cases of other teachers as well, contained in reliquaries, which may be of crystal, gold or other materials. Quite naturally, therefore, when Buddhism was ascendant in India there was a great spurt in the building of *Śtupas* but with the gradual disappearance of the faith from India and the revival of Brāhmanism the enthusiams of building *Śtupas* suffered a decline. Despite that, however, numerous *Śtupas* were erected during the Gupta Age, though very few have survived through the ravages of time for unlike the Gupta temples the *Śtupas* were generally built of bricks.

Among the few that remain till now, albiet in a ruined and mutilated condition, reference may be made of the *Śtupas* at Mirpur Khās in Sindh, at Jarāsandha-kā-Baithaka in Rājgir, at Dhameka in Sāranath and at Jaulian and Mohra Moradu in Taxila. The last two show how the style of the Gandhāra school continued to flourish in the North-West even during the early part of the Gupta period though in a more or less Indianised form. The structures at Jaulian are very interesting. They

consist of a main and smaller *Śtupas*, chapels and a monastery, the latter with an assembly hall, refectory, kitchen, store-room, bathroom and latrine, indicating a comparatively luxurious development. It also showed that the monks were no longer dependent upon the begging bowl for all their food. The sculpture, remarks A. K. Coomaraswamy, dates from a little before or after 400 A.D. and is executed in clay or stucco once coloured and gilt. The style though still fairly vigorous is less refined and academic.

The other *Śtupa* at Taxila has an unusually high drum which stands on a rectangular basement approached by a flight of steps. The style is simple but impressive and from it, in all probability, evolved the many-terraced *Śtupas* of Kāśmir, Jāvā and Burmā.

The *Śtupa* at Mirpura Khās in Sindh is a brick structure standing on a square basement and chiefly remarkable for the existence of three small chapels and cellas within the mass of the basement on the Wertern side. This monument affords probably the only Indian example of a type of structure combining *Śtupa* and chapels in a way later on to be greatly elaborated in Burmā. Another remarkable feature of the *Śtupa* is the existence of a true brick arch in the central chapel. This shows that the Muslims were not the first to introduce the vaulted arch into the Indian architecture.

The Dhameka *Śtupa* at Sārnāth may be dated to the early sixth century and is of the cylindrical type. The structure consists of a circular stone drum resting on the ground level without the usual rectangular basement. Above the drum rises a cylindrical mass of brick work with four niches half-way up the base. Just below the niches is what A. K. Coomaraswamy calls "a broad course of exquisitely carved elaborate ornament, geometrical and floral, in the manner of painted ceiling at Ajantā" which in fact gives us a glimpse of the whole structure in its original form.

The *Śtupa* at *Jarāsandha-ka-Baithaka* in Rājgir, dateable to about 500 A.D., is a tower-like erection rising over a substantial basement which is now in ruins.

TEMPLES :

The Gupta period of Indian history heralded a new age in temple architecture. Hitherto temples had either been almost entirely constructed with perishable commodities like wood and bamboo or were excavated in rocks as at Bādāmi. But both these methods proved disadvantageous ; the former for its fragility and the latter because it was ill-suited to the ritualistic needs connected with the worship of images. The architect of this period, therefore, chose stone or dressed stone as the material for erecting the religious monuments. Apart from solidity and permanancy the stone structure gave a better scope to the artist for the application of the principles of architecture as an art. As a result there was a tremendous growth of temple architecture of which one may find numerous references in the contemporary literature and inscriptions as well as in the writings of Hiuen-Tsang.

The Gupta temples, only a very few of which have survived over the centuries, may be divided into five different groups each characteristic in its own way. The first of these types is the flat-roofed square temple consisting of a single chamber with plain walls and a shallow porch in front, a representative example of which may be found in the temple number XVII at Sāñchi. Though modest in dimensions the Sāñchi temple is remarkable for its structural propriety, symmetry and proportion, appreciation for plain surfaces and restraint in ornamentation. S. K. Saraswati feels that the temple may be compared with the best creations of classical architecture in Greece.

Temples of similar type with some slight variations are found at Eran, Tigawa, Aihole, Uchahara and in the Lalitpur district as well as at Garhwa and Udayagiri. Some times the

roof slabs are fitted together by overlapping grooves as at Tigawa and Aihole. At other times the roof consists of a single slab as at Uchahara. The pillars are generally all alike and resemble those of the Sāñchi temple.

The second type is the flat-roofed square temple with a covered ambulatory around the sanctum cella and a front porch, sometimes with a second story above. The Śiva temple at Bhumarā and the Pārvati temple at Nachna-Kuthārā may be cited as excellent examples of this type. The former is now in all but ruins ; however, what little still remains is enough to speak of its original beauty, magnificence and brilliance. It had splendidly ornamented figures of *Gaṇas*, *Kirthimukhas* and divinities in finely wrought *Chaitya* window niches. The carvings and workmanship were in the best tradition of Gupta art and the rich arabesques of pillars and door frames indicate a date somewhere in the middle of the sixth century. The Pārvatī temple at Nachna-Kuthārā is, however, marked by a simplicity of designs and decorations both soothing and charming at the same time.

The Lād Khan, the Kont Gudi and the Meguti temples at Aihole also belong to the same group. The first temple, dating about 450 A.D. is a very low flat structure, its walls consisting of beautifully perforated stone slabs set between heavy square pilasters with bracket capitals. Above this and right round is the double roll-moulded roof border decorated with small well-spaced *Chaītya* arches. The pillars of the porch have on them, in the typical Gupta fashion, figures of river-goddesses. On the roof and just above the sanctum cella is small square shaine of slab construction with a porch forming an independent shrine of the sun.

The Kont Gudi and Meguti temples are of the same type though in their case the sanctum cella is joined to the back wall thereby making circumambulation within the temple impossible. Neither of these temples are architecturally something very

great and do not actually possess anything to commend much about.

The third type appears to be but an elaboration of the first differing very little in general plan and arrangement. The only innovation in this case is the introduction of the *Śikhara* (or tower) above the temple. The most representative examples of this type are the Dasāvatāra temple of Deogarh, the Mahādeva temple at Nachna Kuthārā, the brick temple at Bhitārgāon, one at Pathari and the great Mahābodhi temple at Bodh Gayā.

On the banks of the river Vetravati at Deogarh the Dasāvatāra temple stands "as an immortal monument of Gupta art". Built in about 600 A. D., "it is like a perpetual tribute to the creative genius of the Gupta sculptors who conceived nobly and with equal elegance gave plastic form to their ideas". The walls are plain "except that on three sides there are recessed sculptured panels representing the Gajendramoksha episode, Vishṇu *anantasayin* and a scene between the two ascetics Nara and Nārāyana. The best preserved portion of the temple and carrying the highest appeal from the aesthetic point of view, however, is its doorway facing the west. The two door-jambs and the upper lintel reveal several remarkable features. The jambs are adorned with beautiful standing male and female attendants *(pratihāri)* who with their gorgeous flowing hair and elegant drapery rank among some of the most exquisite creations of Gupta workmen. Along with these are the amorous couples *(dampati)*, dwarfish male figures *(promathas)*, the tree of prosperity *(Śri-Vriksha)* and bands of rosettes *(phultāvali)*. The portions above the figures have beautiful bands of foliage pattern on artistically carved scroll works as *patralatā* (or *patiavali*). The lintel is equally brilliant, its two ends adorned with images of the river Goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā standing of their respective vehicles *(Vāhanas)*. At the centre there is a projecting image *(lalātabimba)* which is seen for the first time in Gupta temples.

The basement of the temple all around was decorated with Rāmāyaṇa panels, an arrangement quite common in Java but rarely seen on Indian temples. Most of the panels have been destroyed though some like the one depicting Rāma, Sitā and Lakśhmaṇa at the hermitage of Śavarī are in tact. Above the temple is the *Śikhara*, elaborately done in several stories with *Chaitya* windows and angled *amalakas*.

The Dasāvatara temple is indeed one of the finest Hindu religious edifices built in the Gupta period. It is a pity that at present we behold but its ruined form, its *Śikhara* having broken down and many of its Rāmāyṇa panels having suffered destruction. Yet even in this dilapidated condition it has a beauty and charm all of its own that captivates the observer.

The Bhitargaon temple is another example of a monument which is magnificent even in its ruined condition. The plan is square with doubly recessed corners, double cornices and a recessed frieze of carved brick. Above the cornice rises the pyramidal roof with tiers of *Chaitya* niches in horizontal courses. The walls are decorated with terracotta panels of Brāhmanical subjects.

The great Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh-Gaya, belonging to the same type, is, as it stands to day, a restoration (in 1880-81) of the Burmese restorations of 1105 and 1298 and still earlier medieval renovations and restorations. The temple was certainly standing, when Hiuen-Tsang visited India (629-41 A.D.) and there is even an indirect reference to it in Fa-Hien's writings. Coomaraswamy concluded that the temple originally was built in the early Gupta period though the porch on the eastern side is undoubtedly a later addition. The temple itself consists of a straight edged nine story high pyramidal tower surmounted by a smatler, fluted and bulbous tower like structure tapering at the top. This huge tower has at its lower part, just above the entrance to the temple, a tall narrow lacet opening admitting light to the sanctum. The whole

structure is built on a single raised *pradakshina* terrace which has four smaller versions of the central tower in its four corners. The main thing to notice about the temple is its massive proportions though the sculptural figures and patterns on its walls are not as refined and beautiful as at the Dasavatāra temple in Deogarh. The temples at Nachna Kuthara and Pāthari also belong to the same group though they are not so important as the other three discussed above.

Hiuen-Tsang remarks that at the Nālandā University constructed by Narasiṃhagupta Bātāditya (c. 500-530 A.D.) there was an enormous brick temple, three hundred feet high which resembled the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh-Gaya. He further adds that the temple was exquisitely decorated with the finest carvings and magnificently furnished. The enthralling beauty of the work struck the visitor and he wondered at the genius of the artisans who built it. Nothing at present survives but the massive basement of this great monument. Some of the niches on this basement representing fully developed curvilinear *nāgara Śikharas* may be later additions.

The fourth type of temples, rectangular in shape with an apsidal back and barrel vaulted roof or sometimes a flat roof with a *Śikhara* at the top is a survival of the early *Chaitya* form of architecture. There are very few surviving temples of this type though a few isolated representations may be found at Chezarla, Ter and Aihole. The temple at Ter in the Sholāpur District, is a simple structural brick *Chaitya*-hall of about the fourth century and seems once to have enshrined a *Śtupa* and only subsequently to have been converted to Vaishṇava use. The barrel-roof is rounded off in the rear while in front it terminates over the entrance in the shape of a *Chaitya* window enclosing architectural reliefs. The work on the whole was simply done and neatly finished.

The Kapotesvara at Chezarla is also a structural *Chaitya* hall originally Buddhist but later converted to Hindu usage.

Here the gable end of the barrel-roof is profusely decorated with some very fine carvings. The roll mouldings here are more developed and finer in form than at Ter though the walls are plain and flat.

Another temple which belongs to this class is the incomparable Durgā temple at Aihole. Built in the same plan the temple has a flat roof and a *Vārāndāh* running right round supported by a sliding stone roof and massive square pillars with flat brackets. There is a northern *Śikhara* above the *Sanctum* which at present is in a ruined and mutilated condition. However, what still remains of the tower is enough to tell about the genius of the architects who constructed it. Excellent carvings in great abuandance were showered upon the *Śikhara* in an admirably disciplined manner. Extravagance and grandeur weare here skilfully controlled to meet the tastes of the refined. The pillars round the *Sanctum* were also beautifully carved particularly the one on the apsidal end of the temple. The five-tier course on which the whole structure was constructed also constained some very fine carvings skilfully and meticulously done.

Temples which do not conform to any of the four types hitherto discussed are, for the sake of convenience, grouped together under a separate head : 'miscellaneous'. Here particular reference must be had to the circular temple, Maniyar Math, at Rajgir and the Huchhimalligudi temple at Aihole. Maniyar Math, a hollow circular structure is a unique temple. Traditionally known as a treasury, Coomaraswamy feels that it may have represented a colossal *lingam* like those at Fatehpur near Baramula, Kāśmir and Tirupara-Kunram near Madras. All that remains at present is the circular basement with a very small part of the superstructure. There are niches all round the base separated by pilasters and containing fine, sensitive stucco reliefs. Of particular interest are the images of a six-armed dancing Śiva (Natarāja) and the Nāginis.

The Huchhimalligudi temple at Aihole is almost similar to the second type of temple discussed above though it has a northern *Śikhara* rising above the sanctum cella. The tower like the one at the Durgā temple, Aihole, is a work of fine workmanship.

Though a large number of temples were built during the Gupta age only a few could be compared in beauty and magnificience with the temples of the Cholas, Chālukyas or the Chandels. The Gupta period was essentially a formative age of stone temples and as such most of the constructions were of a rough and ready nature. The artisans being pioneers in the field of structural stone architecture were still cautious and in an experimental stage. They were seeking to provide a structural pattern and system on which future developments could take place. Hence the importance of the Gupta temples lie not so much in their beauty and excellence—though undoubtedly some were really magnificient—but in the fact that they served to provide the future architects with a formal to work on.

SCULPTURE :

Gupta art reached its highest form of development in the field of sculpture. Though less ponderous than the ancient types it is still distinguished by its volume ; its energy proceeds from within the form and is static rather than kinetic. Unlike the figures at Bhārhut and Sāñchi the Gupta figures relegate all animal and vegetal patterns to the background and seem to stand out as independent and free. The figures themselves are now the principal source of energy and inspiration and assume a great deal of importance. This sculptural art has a rhythm and a flowing movement of its own which is at once captivating and enthralling in its effect. The vegetal patterns so prominent in earlier sculptures are here confined to the brackets, panels and borders where they exuberantly recoil on themselves in playful contrasts of light and shade.

Since it is in youth that the inner movement of rhythm and flow finds its fullest expression, it is almost invariably youth that captures the imagination and engrosses the vision of the artist of this period. The body shines in smoothness and almost transparent luminosity of its texture. The plastic and modelling in its neutralism and rarefication hardly finds any parallel in any other period of Indian art. "Discending the earthliness Mathurā, the sensuousness of Veṅgi and the exulted movement of Amarāvatī the Gupta sculptural art stands for its serenity, security and certainity." Emphasis is now laid on the conquest of mind and not only in voluminous body and concentrated energy. The result was the creation of a very high form of religious art characterised by the lovely Buddha images of Sāranāth.

The seated Buddha figure of Chunar sandstone at Sāranāth is one of the most well known sculptures of this period. It is different from the Buddha figures of the Mathura school in being more refined and more slender in treatment. The dress is completely transparent though the folds at the feet are visible. The body is straight and erect but not stiff in the least ; the eyes are half-closed and cast downwards, while a faint smile lingers on the lips. The halo round the head is elaborately decorated with vegetal patterns and a *Gandharva* on either side giving equilibrium to the whole. The position of the hands (*dharmachakra-mudrā*) and the wheel at the pedestal indicate the teaching of the first sermon ; the five figures with shaven heads on the pedestal are probably the companions who become the first followers of the great teacher. The woman and the child beside them most probably represent the donors.

Personally speaking, the statue arises in us a feeling of admiration and respect. The half-closed downcast eyes, sharp nose, the broad lips with a faint smile, the erect upright but relaxed body, all give an appearance of inward calm and serenity. There is something placid, smoothing and comforting,

in this image which makes it one of the most outstanding work of early Indian sculpture.

Another great work of Gupta sculpture was the standing Buddha figure of red sandstone at Mathura. Louis Frederick is of the opinion that this statue with its feet parted preserved the style of the earlier Buddha images of Mathurā though the features in this case are finer and more refined. It should, however, be noted that being slightly earlier in date to the Sāranāth Buddha the Mathurā figure lacks the refinement and polish of the later work. Here, the face is more roundish and the lips a bit more thicker. The dress is, however, very skilfully represented in long, fine, supple folds and it adheres closely to the body so that the physical features are clearly discernible. The hands were originally in the *Abhaya-mudrā* but the right hand is at present broken at the elbow. The halo round the head is profusely decorated with floral motifs. The statue, however, does not have any life in it. Unlike the Sāranāth figure, it does not look alive ; instead there is something unnatural and artificial ; the stone fails to convey any feelings or emotions.

The seated Buddha of sandstone at Mankuwar near Allahabad is important for primarily two reasons. It is possibly the only extent Buddha figure of Gupta age with a shaved head. Moreover, as in the early Gupta examples the fingers of the hand are webbed. The statue is bare to the waist and is rather roundish with half-closed eyes, broad nose and thick lips.

Among the other Buddhist stone images of this period mention may be made of the colossal reclining Buddha of the Parinirvana shrine at Kaśia (Kusinagara), the seated inscribed Buddha of Bodh-gaya, the seated Buddha at Sāñchi, the Buddhist figures in reliefs at Ajantā Cave XIX, Cave X and at Kanheri, Karli and Aurangabad. The Kaśia figure bears the name of the donor and the sculptor, the Abbot Haribaba and Dinna

of Mathurā respectively, while the Bodh-gaya image bears the date 383 A.D.

The sculptors of the Gupta period did not confine their activity only to the medium of stone. They worked with various metals too. Among the numerous Buddhist sculptures in metals particular reference must be made of the colossal copper image of Buddha found at Sultanganj in the Bhagalpur district, the richly decorated brass figure from Fatehpur in Kangra district and the Boston bronze statue said to have been found in Burma.

The towering (7 ft. 6 inches) Buddha image of Sultānganj is cast in two layers, the inner of which was moulded on an earthly, cinder-like core, composed of a mixture of sand, clay, charcoal and ricehusks. The segments of this inner layer were held together by much corroded iron bands, originally three quarters of an inch thick. The outer layer of copper seems to have been cast over the inner one presumably by the cire perdue process ; it was made in several sections ; one of which consisted of the face and the connected parts down to the breast. The entire image weighs about a ton.

The Sultanganj figure, a masterly work of craftsmanship, has a calmness and serenity comparable to the seated Buddha figure of Sāranāth. Here the face is less broader though the eyes are sensitive, the nose very sharp and the lips broad and smiling ; the neck is gracefully slender and the body is excellently moulded with the hands in the *Abhaya-mudrā*. The dress is transparent and done in folds spread on either side of the body. This image is possibly the most sensitive and graceful metal statue of the Gupta age.

The small (11.8 inches) brass image of Buddha from Fatehpur in Kaṅgrā district is an excellent example of how refined the Gupta sculpture had developed to become by the sixth century. This seated Buddha figure is done mostly in

brass though the eyes and the *urṇā* are done in silver and some other details in both silver and copper. Here the Śākya sage is depicted in the *Dharmachakra-mudrā* and in *Padmāsana* with a scarf *(urṇā)* round the upper left part of his body and a necklace around his neck.

The Boston bronze statue (1 ft. 8 inches) is said to have been found in Burma though Coomaraswamy is of the opinion that it is of Indian origin. At present the image is in the Boston Museum and in a mutilated condition with its right hand broken almost from the shoulder and its left leg broken at the heels. The head is disproportionately large though quite broad and full. The dress reaching down to the feet and spreading on either side of the body is transparent. The upper left part of the body is covered possibly with a scarf. The image on the whole is unimpressive and does not arouse any feeling of genuine admiration.

The large number of extent non-Buddhist sculptures of the Gupta period are marked by their richness of beauty. They were generally executed on mud or pressed earth though metal images were also not very rare. In the rural areas terracotta sculpture was extremely popular. The most important specimens of non-Buddhist sculpture include the Varāha-Avatār relief at Udayagiri, the Pauranic epic panels at Deogarh, the Nativity of Krishṇa from Pathari, the slab with flying *Gandharvas* and *Apasarās* from Sondani, the River Goddess from Besnagar, the Torana Pillars at Mandor with *Krishṇa lilā* scenes, the stucco relief of Maniyar Math (Rajgir), the Kārttikeya from Benaras, the sculptures of the Ramesvara cave at Ellora, the small bronze statue of Brahmā from Mirpur Khas and the bronze coated iron plummet from river Surma in Bengal.

The Varāha Avātar relief at Udayagiri in Bhopal is a work of immense proportions very skilfully done. Varāha or the third incarnation *(Avatār)* of Vishṇu is seen here raising Pṛithvī



Bodhisattva Padmapani
Ajanta, Cave No. I.



Facade
Ajanta, Cave No. 9.

(Earth) from the waters at the commencement of a cycle of creation. The gignatic figure of Varāha was executed with such artistic skill as to convey the feeling of great awe and bewilderment. Gods and goddesses are depicted in rows looking on with respectful wonder at the great creator.

The Paurāṇic panels on the Southern, Eastern and Northern walls of the Deogarh temple are extremely well done being exquisite examples of Gupta sculpture. The panels represent three episodes from the Purāṇas :—

(a) The Gajendra Moksha where Lord Vishṇu redeems the Lord of the elephants from the clutches of a monster-size Nāga.

(b) The Nara-Nārāyana-*tapascharya* which depicts the performance of austerities of the two sages Nara and Nārāyana in their Himalayan hermitage of Badrināth ;

(c) The Anantasāyi Vishṇu where Vishṇu is seen sleeping on the cosmic serpent Sesha.

Cunningham is of the opinion that "the drawings of the figures is generally spirited, and, in the case of the sleeping Vishṇu the attitude is not only easy, but graceful, and the expression dignified......". He concludes that..."the excellence of these Deogarh sculptures has struck every one who has seen them......".

The terraced basement, Jagatipitha, on which the Deogarh temple stands, was adorned by a row of carved panels which relate the story of Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata. Among them mention may be made of the following :—

(a) The visit of Rāma-Lakshmaṇa-Sītā to the hermitage of Agasthya where the sage and his wife Lopāmudrā welcome their honoured guests ;

(b) Lakshmaṇa mutilating Surpaṇakhā in presence of Rāma ;

(c) Resurrection of Ahalyā by Rāma from the petrified condition ;

(d) The birth of Kṛshṇa ;

(e) Nanda-Yoshoḍā in their domestic retreat fondling Kṛshṇa and Balarāma ;

(f) Kṛshṇa kicking the milk cart ;

(g) Kṛshṇa and his friend Sudāmā.

The life-size sandstone representation of the nativity of Kṛshṇa or Mahāvīra from Pithari, at present in the Gwalior Museum, is another remarkable artistic feat of the period under review. The mother is here depicted in an unusually graceful manner, half-reclining with her head resting on her right hip. She wears a pair of elaborately decorated armlets, a pair of bangles on each hand, a mop chain extending down her breasts and a necklace. The upper portion of her body is to all purposes bare while the lower part is covered with a simple dress running down to her ankles. She wears a waistband tied in loops and a pair of anklets. Her face is a picture of contentment and satisfaction with half-closed eyes and slightly parted lips. The baby is lying close by its mother resting its head on a pillow with its legs slightly bent upwards at the knees. At the back are depicted four village belles carrying agricultural tools and implements. All these figures have been excellently modelled and delicately finished so that each one of them look vivid and natural. They seem to be throbbing with life, at ease yet full of grace and poise.

The slab with the flying *Gandharvas* and *Apsarās* from Sondani, now in the Gwalior Museum, is another example of the very high standard of Gupta sculpture. Each figure here is moulded in a remarkably skilful fashion with elaborate head-dresses and hair styles, rich ornaments and jewellary as well as clothes of different shapes and designs. The detail that A. K. Coomaraswamy supplies in his book, "The History of Indian and Indonesian Art," serves to confirm this observation.

The Makaravāhinī Gaṅgādevī from Besnagar, at present in the Boston Museum, is another very fine work. The goddess

is depicted standing on the Makara with her right foot firmly set and the left, crossing behind the right, lightly touches the Makara's head. She wears a short tight-fitting dress below the the navel. The jewelleries are simple and the hair is tightly arranged. The body is slightly bent to the right at the hips. The entire panel was in all probability the base of a door jamb and there is a row of vegetal patterns above the figure of the goddess.

The Kṛshṇa-Govardhanadhara panel at Mandor is definitely an inferior work compared to the ones just considered. On top the mount Govardhana is shown with many peaks, amongst which are seen two cobras, a lion and a horseheaded fairy ; Kṛshṇa with *Gopas* and *Gopinis* together with their cattle are depicted below. The figures have all been packed in too short a place—the obvious result is a jumble of different figures and that too not very clearly moulded.

The stucco reliefs of Manayar Math particularly those of the *Nāginis* are as brilliantly done as the nativity panel of Pathari. The *Nāginis* who possess a charm and brilliance of their own are gracefully feminine in their simplicity. There is a beauty and warmth in them which amazes and enthralls us and leaves us to wonder about the genius of the sculptors of a glorious age.

The sandstone representation of Lord Kārttikeya from Benaras is remarkable for its heavy and rounded form. Here, he is depicted as seated cross-legged on his *Vāhana* (vehicle), the peacock. He had an elaborately decorated crown, rather heavy earrings, long curly hair, a broad necklace and a pair of armlets. The body is moulded as full and round, the upper being bare and the lower part covered with a tight-fitting short dress extending down to the knees and bound round the waist.

The sculptures of the Rāmesvara cave at Ellora are distinguished for their remarkable grace and beauty. The

figures of the *Devatās* at the pillar brackets are really excellent works of art. The river goddesses at the two ends of the *Vārāndāh* are works of rare beauty. Calm, grandeur, grace and charm seem to have mixed in free abundance in these magnificent sculptures.

The Gupta sculptors made use of the metal medium also though very few metal sculptures have survived. Mention must, however, be made of the bronze image of Brahmā originally found at Mirpur Khās but at present in Karachi Museum. The figure has been quite well moulded with an elaborate hair arrangement. Its hands are in the *Abhaya-mudrā* and there is a *uttariya* over the left shoulder, while a loose dress adhering tightly to the body, however, extends down from the waist to the ankles. There is nothing very remarkable about the figure though there is an air of serenity and calm spread over its face.

A second metal sculpture to note is a bronze coated iron plummet from river Surma in Bengal. It is an excellent example of how high the standard of sculpture depicting things other than the human body had reached in the Gupta age. An excellent photograph of the original is supplied by A.K. Coomaraswamy in his book quoted above.

Before ending the discussion on Gupta sculpture we would like to draw the attention of the reader to two pieces of sculptures recovered from Uchahara and Nachra Kuthara which would be of special interest to all art students of this period. The Śivaliṅga of Uchahara fully exemplified the glory of Gupta art. Śiva's face shows the perfect expression of Samādhi. The gorgeous matted locks in two tires are charmingly depicted in an orderly fashion with a girdling band in the middle and strands of descending locks on the two sides are also arranged in a happy manner. The whole treatment is distinguished by a balance and well-defined features and the effect of eminence imparts dignity to the expression.

The next sculpture from Nachna Kuthara depicts *Mahānaṭa* Śiva in the *Tāṇḍava* dance. The expression on the face bespeaks great majesty and steadfast support to the titanic pulsations of the dance. The released energy is expressed through the upper two arms rhythmically thrown up and artistically framing the head and also a pair of lower arms, one of which in puissant horizontal extension is partially preserved. This seems to be the earliest representation of the *Tāṇḍava* motif so far known in Indian art.

VEGETAL AND GEOMETRIC PATTERNS:

A word must here be said about the vegetal and geometric carvings of this period. It has already been mentioned that in the Gupta age the human figure gained predominance as far as sculpture was concerned and decorative patterns comprising the animal and vegetal world or purely abstract geometric devices were pushed out of the reliefs on to the borders or to sculptural and architectural bands. There "they were vital, prolific and brimful in their richness and exuberance but always chaste and elegant. Precisely outlined beads and rossets, exquisite arabesques and dentiles, fully and richly modelled stalks and foliages, twisted rope designs with hanging pearls and other ornaments, intertwined creepers and figures of *gaṇas*, men and women and grotesques, all deeply and obliquely cut into clear and precise form, meander their sinuous and capricious courses in a curly and concentric manner and are bathed all over in rich display of light and darkness". Apart from these, rich geometric patterns were also chalked out on flat and angular surfaces particularly on the Dhameka *stupa* of Sārnāth and in the door jambs at the temple of Deogarh. A careful study reveals that vegetal and geometric patterns were prolifically and profusely used in the Gaṅgā-Yamunā valley and the Prachya country.

PAINTING:

Unlike stone architecture painting did not concern itself with themes and expressions of deeper and more fundamental

significance but partook a secular character and was in all probability in general practice and greater demand. Contemporary literatures reveal that painting was an accomplishment which everybody, rich and poor alike, desired to attain. Vātsyāyan in Kāmasutra includes painting as one of the sixty-four fine arts (*kalās*) and mentions drawing panels, paints and brushes as parts of the ordinary furniture of a gentleman's (*Nāgaraka*) personal apartment. Yaśodhara in his commentary on Vātsyāyana's work says that already in the Gupta period attempts were being made to give practical and theoretical guidance to an increasingly large number of ameteurs and professionals who came to practice that art. He refers to the Soḍāṅga, the six limbs or canons of painting, viz., *Rupabheda* (types), *Pramāna* (ideal proportions), *Bhāva* (expression of mood), *Lavanya Yajanam* (embodiment of charm), *Sadrisya* (points of view) and *Varnika-bhanga* (preparation of colours) *Vishṇu-dharmattaram* confirms this and goes on to introduce further technical details as methods of preparation of the ground for murals, preparation and application of colours, methods of shading the line, adding high lights, foreshortening of limbs and features, different methods of treating the volume, expression of mood (*bhavanā*) and movement (*chetanā*). This text classified paintings according to themes as *Satya* (realistic), *Vainika* (lyrical), *Nagara* (secular) and *Misra* (mixed). All this shows that at this period serious and detailed thinking about the theory and techniques of painting was going on and it was during this period that the aesthetic canons respect of the art of painting were formularised. These canons evolved a language of gestures (*mudrā*), poses (*bhanga*), attitudes (*sthanam*) and proportion (*promanani*).

Painting, thus, we see acquired a great deal of popularity as well as importance in the Gupta age. Unfortunately, however, very little have survived defying the ravenous claws of time and they are at present confined to a handful of caves and *stupas*. Yet there was a time, when every home was adorned with marvellous paintings and picture galleries. Con-

temporary literature iucluding the epics, reveals that the walls and ceilings of the royal palaces and houses of the rich were decorated with mural paintings (*bhittichitra*) and furnished with picture galleries (*chitrasālās* or *chitrasadmas*) which in turn were decorated with portraits or portrait panels on wooden boards. Less afluent people had the walls of their houses decorated with very fine paintings. A casual remark by Bānabhaṭṭa in his Harshacharita in respect of wall paintings seems to indicate that the themes of murals that used to adorn the walls and ceilings of palaces and houses were generally very broad and comprehensive and embraced the entire panorama of life and nature (*darsita-visvarupa*).

Besides this there was another kind of secular painting to which reference was made by Viśākhadatta executed on textile scrolls and dealing with themes of a narrative-diductive nature showing the results of *Karma* in the other world, these paintings were in all probability of a folk and popular character and were called *Yamapatas*. Buddhaghosa, the celebrated Buddhist scholar and divine sage of this age, also refers to a similar kind of painting to which he gives the name of *Charanachitras*. These consisted of scenes of happy and unhappy destinies of men after death with appropriate labels attached to them and were shown in portable galleries. They were almost certainly the precursors of *patachitras*, widely current in Eastern India even in the nineteenth century.

As for the religious paintings they were done almost exclusively on a specially prepared plaster on the walls of religious edifices. The *Visnudharmottaram* lays down a complete prescription for the preparation of the ground for painting which it calls *Vajralepa*. However, judging carefully from the extent remains it does not seem to have been strictly adhered to anywhere. In practice powdered rock, clay and cowdung not in frequently mixed with chaff or vegetable fibres, sometimes also with *mudga* decoction or molases, were made into a paste-like substance which was thoroughly and evenly pressed like

plaster on the hard and porous surface of the rock. The plaster was then levelled and polished with a trowel and when still wet was laid over with a coat of fine white lime wash so that the plaster would take the lime. The entire ground, according to Nihar Ranjan Roy, was allowed to dry before the application of colours. Coomaraswamy is, however, of the opinion that the colours were applied, while the surface was still wet, a view which at present seems doubtful. These are not like the Italian frescoes buono, but are fresco-secco. In this case after the application of colours the painted surface was lightly varnished giving it a lustrous finish.

Nihar Ranjan Roy gives a detailed account of how the paintings were done. The outlines were boldly drawn at first in *dhaturāga* or red ochre ; the contours were then filled with red overlaid with a very thin monochrone terra verte that shows the red ochre through it ; then while the local colour was applied in different tones, the outline was also applied in different tones, the outline was also renewed in brown, deep red and black, with thin and broad shading by dotting (*bindu*) and cross lines (*patra*) to give it an effect of rounded three dimensional volume.

The principle colours in use were red ochre (*Dhaturāga*), vivid red (*Kumkuma*), crimson (*Śindura*), Yellow ochre (*Haritāla*), indigo blue, lapis lazuli, blue, lamp black (*Kajjala*), chalk white (*Khadimati*), terra verte (*Gerumāti*) and green (*Jangala*). Mixed colours like grey were used but not very frequently. Neither were all the colours used everywhere ; nor was there any attempt at contrasts of a medly of colours ; instead the aim was to saturate the surface with highly charged and dense colours mainly terra verte, Indian red and earth buff in innumerable tones and shades.

The best frescoes of the Gupta period are to be found at Ajantā though now only a small fragment of the wonderful

paintings, which once covered the entire flat surfaces of the long series of caves, remain. But even these unmistakably portray a crowded world "of lively and fresh vegetation, of gods and semidivine beings, of *Apsarāses* and *Kinnaras*, of genii and grotesques, of a rich and varied flora of pageantry and processions, of gaity and love, of grace and charm, of sublimity and coarseness, all bathed in the mellowed light of the softness and elegance of a highly intellectual, refined and sophisticated civilization. "A dramatic panorama of rich contemporary life of princes and peasants, nolbes and warriors, sages and beggars —of different ethnic and national types—a life lived in cities and palaces, in court and forests, in way sides and gardens, lived with dignity and nobility and in grace and charm, amids decorative splendour moves before our eyes in radiant joy and freedom born of a healthy and effortless material existence." Such simple yet graphic narration done in a refined elegance and emotionally expressive way is indeed unsurpassed in the whole history of graphic art.

No frame divides one scene from the other and each picture mingles into the other in an effortless and graceful way. The pictures lack perspective, yet the colour and shade is so applied that they seem to be throbbing with life and vitality.

Ajantā painting were done at a time when Buddhism had been completely transformed from the early philosophical and moral concepts of the Hinayāna to the completely theistic religion of the Mahāyāna. Whereas in early Buddhism Sākyamuni was regarded as the Great Teacher who had overthrown the authority of the Vedas, in the Buddhism of the Mahāyāna he had assumed the stature of an eternal God. In early Buddhism the doctrine rather than the Buddha was worshipped and the possibility of salvation from the retribution of *Karma* (or rebirth), was open only to those who had entered the religious order. The Buddha himself was remembered only in symbolical references to his earthing mission, because it was belived that he who had gone beyond the fetters of the body

could not be endowed by art with the likeness of a body. With the passing of the centuries various influences led to creation of the Buddha image and to his deification. In Ajantā we come across this idea,—Buddha is here worshipped in the form of an image.

It is quite impossible to consider all the extent paintings of Ajantā in detail over here. Lack of space makes possible only a very limited discussion of a few representative painted panels. The ones considered here are :—(1) the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Cave 1) ; (2) Scenes from the Mahājanaka Jātaka (Cave 1) ; (3) Ceiling decorations (Caves 1, 2, 16), (4) Scenes from the Visvantara Jātaka ; (5) Indra and his cortege (Cave 17), (6) *Apsarāses* and *Gandharvas* (Cave 17) ; (7) A *Yaksha* and his consort (Cave 17) ; (8) The Dying princess (Cave 16). Among these the paintings of Cave 1 are not strictly speaking works of the Gupta period, for they were done around the first quarter of the seventh century. They are here treated along with the actual Gupta paintings, for they are of the same style and belong to the same school.

The Bodhisattvas who figure quite prominently in the Ajantā paintings, are mythical beings, or archangels, who pass from the realm of the immortal Buddha to the world of man. By definition the term Bodhisattva means one capable of supreme knowledge so that Sākyamuni himself may be described as a Bodhisattva before his Enlightenment. The Bodhisattvas of the Mahāyana pantheon are the personifications of Buddha's power and virtue. The Avalokiteshvara of Ajantā (Cave 1) is the embodiment of Buddha's mercy and compassion.

The painting in question is supernaturally natural. The shading is arbitrary and has no connection with the effects of illumination in real life. Parts of the body have been done in a way which is not naturalistic. Yet the figure as a whole conveys to us a feeling of magnanimity and compassion. There is something very reassuring, something very comforting in the

slightly bent head, dancing eyebrows, merciful eyes, in the tremulous and exquisite gesture of the hands that immediately arrests our attention. The loveliness of the painting is so refined away from humanity that it becomes a symbol of celestial beauty and purity.

Among the large narrative panels in Cave I is a cycle devoted to the Mahājanaka Jātaka. It deals with the story of an earlier *Avatar* of Buddha, when he was incarnated as *Rājā* who renounced his throne to follow the life of an ascetic. In the central scene the king is represented as seated with his consort and a throng of female attendants to whom he conveys his decision of renunciation of the worldly life. This panel is a work that would charm one and all. The king is represented as seating on a couch, barebodied, leaning slightly towards the queen with his hands in the *Dharmachakra-mudrā*. He wears a pair of earrings and a beaded necklace, his curly black hair held back by an elaborately decorated crown. His face conveys a feeling of mercy and determination. He is sorry for the reaction which his decision causes, yet he is firm in his conviction ; he is happy to have found the source of greater happiness and satisfaction.

The figure of the queen is equally beautiful. Her eyes convey a feeling of sorrow and disappointment which is very human and touching. Her right hand is half raised in a vain attempt to dissuade the king from such a step. "Her slender rounded arms, warm full breasts, narrow waist, slender neck are all done in a way which is elegant, sensitive, soft and charming." The female attendants are also done in a professionally skilful way each conveying a particular emotion either fear or disappointment, sorrow or regret, hopelessness and surprise ; none is happy and satisfied. There indeed is a lesson to be learnt. There is nothing in this world that is permanent, yet all of us try to enjoy the material joys to the full and try to cling to all our worldly possessions as long as we can. Here the queen and the attendants are sad at the

king's decision of renunciation, yet they know that they cannot stay with the king till eternity.

The queen and the royal attendants are all represented in different poses conforming to the emotions they convey. Barring the queen who is seated all the other figures are represented in different forms of *tribhangas*, i.e. the body is bent in such a way as to form three distinct parts. The pillars and walls shown at the background confirm the view that the royal palaces were profusely decorated with splendid and gorgeous paintings in different shades of colour.

Another panel in the same cave depicts the royal renunciation story of the Mahājanka Jātaka in a different light. The most remarkable and attractive feature of this piece of painting is the figure of "the Lady with the toilet tray", a remarkably vivid and graceful representation. The artist who painted this must have been a past master in his job for here he employed all his skill and experience to present us the figure of a royal attendant charmingly elegant, darkly handsome, full of youth, warmth and beauty.

A third panel devoted to the Mahājanka Jātaka depicts a dancing girl and musicians. The former is presented here in a *Tribbanga* pose, her head bent to the left and her hands are turned to the right in a characteristic fashion. She is dressed in a long full sleeved robe extending down to the ankles of her feet. The musicians accompanying the dancer are also done in a characteristic fashion depicting various moods and emotions. An interesting thing to note is the hair styles of these girls ; they greatly resemble the styles in vogue at present in India.

One other painting in Cave 1 should be considered for its sheer beauty and charm. Popularly known as the Black Princess it is according to Yazdani, one of the finest paintings in the world. Its fine modelling, exquisite ornamentation,

tranquility and thoughtfulness are beautifully brought out by the dark complexion against a lighter background. The eyes of the Princess are unusually calm and intimate radiating an astonishing natural friendliness. In fact Munawat Singh believes that "there isn't any other portrait at Ajantā with such perfect eyes".

Not only the four walls of the caves at Ajantā received the attention of the painters. They painted the ceiling as well. Their work was done so skilfully that the ceiling resembles a cloth canopy, the centre being slightly lower than the sides. Narratives were not related here but the painters drew regular patterns, intricate and colourful without being clumsy or untidy. Patterns depicted in Caves 1, 2 and 16 are specially good.

Like Cave 1, Cave 17 also abounds in excellent paintings. One of the principal decorations in its porch depicts an episode from the Visvantara Jātaka, in which the princely hero announces his banishment from his father's kingdom. In a pavilion with orange coloured walls and red pillars the king supports his fainting queen whose swooning pose is accented by the tilt of her head and relaxation of her every limbs emphasizes her distress. This is a remarkable illustration of the Indian principle of *bhāva,* the revelation of moods and feelings in the pose and gesture and expression of forms.

Another thing to note is that the attention of all the other participants—the royal attendants, the servant with a carafe hovering in the background, the beggar and a dwarf looking up at the royal pavilion—converges on the figure of the helpless king.

Another remarkable piece of painting in this cave is the one depicting the Chief of the gods, Indra and his cortege of celestial musicians flying to meet the Buddha on the occasion of his visit to the Heaven of the thirty-three gods.

This beautiful detail reminds us of the flying *Gandharvas.* The suggestion of endless, effortless flight is implied by the direction of the bent legs of the deities, and the ropes of jewel sweeping backward over their breasts. Indra is here differentiated from his attendants by his light colouring and towering crown. He has the ideal, heroic proportions of the great Bodhisattva of Cave 1. Among the many beautiful figures in this composition one should note particularly the beautiful supple figure of a heavenly nymph who bends in adoration before the great god. Behind Indra and his retinue are towering cloud forms.

An Apsarā in Indra's train also arrests our attention by its sheer grace and charm. She drifts through the air while beating out a measure on tiny symbols. "Her beautiful jewelled ornaments would seem to place this picture" in the class of painting which according to the *Śāstras* is of the highest type. Around her neck is a necklace of diamonds, pearls and sapphires with a heavy pendent swaying with her movement. She wears matching strings of jewel in her hair with a stiff white riband round her head. The half closed eyes, sharp nose, small mouth and almost oval face makes her ethereal and sublime. Without a shade of doubt this particular composition is one of the greatest treasures of Gupta art and for that matter Indian art.

The painting-portraying a *Yaksha* and his consort is remarkable for the display of an excellent sense of colour choice and controlled rhythm in the draftsmanship. The figures have been painted with such delicate care that they come out vivid and lively. The ornaments, hair styles and the dress have all been done with meticulous care. Proper attention was taken of colour combination and the effect of shading.

Another great painting was the piece entitled "The Dying Princess" in Cave 16. The picture is remarkable for the vividness with which the feelings of the princess and her attendants

are portrayed. Smith pays it great complements when he remarks, "For pathos and sentiment and the unmistakable way of telling its story this picture, I consider, cannot be surpassed in the history of art. The Florentine could have put better drawing, and the Venetian better colour, but neither could have thrown greater expression into it..."

To discuss only a handful of paintings and leave out the others is an injustice which space compels us to commit here. Even a brief discussion of all the extent paintings at Ajantā would run into several hundred pages. Those discussed here, are, we feel, the best representation of the Ajantā school whose style, technique and the method of narration has received great praise from the greatest art critics of the world. "The pictures and decorative designs in the caves, when compared with Egyptian, Chinese or other ancient paintings are fairly entitled to high rank as works of fine art. In judging them the critic should remember that the wall paintings were executed on an enormous scale and that they were intended to be looked in the mass from a distance and not in minute detail. Small reproductions on a page—a few inches long—cannot possibly give a just idea of the effects aimed at by the artist." Mr. J. Griffiths who spent a long time studying the paintings said that "in. spite of its obvious limitations I find the work so accomplished in execution, so consistent in design and full of such evident delight in beautiful form and colour, that I cannot help ranking it with some of the early art which the world has agreed to praise in Italy......The Ajantā workmanship is admirable......For purposes of art education no better examples could be placed before an Indian art student than those to be found in the caves of Ajantā. Here we have art with life in it ; human faces full of expression, limbs drawn with grace and action, flowers which bloom, birds which soar, and beasts that spring, or patiently carry burdens all are taken from Nature's book..."

The paintings at Bāgh to a large extent correspond to those of Caves I and II of Ajantā. Stylistically they belong to the

same norm—affiliated to Buddhism and relating Jātaka stories. However, there is one difference which is of great significance. Despite a secular and slightly pagan atmosphere, the Ajantā paintings are informed by a religious spirit and present the dominant figures of the compositions in an inwardness of vision and superior detachment of outlook that spread like a web over the entire surface. In Bāgh the paintings are frankly secular, depicting contemporary life with its evident religious association. Smith feels that "the paintings appear to have rivalled those of Ajantā in variety of design, vigorous execution, and decorative quality, life being treated in both places with equal gaiety and hardly a trace of asceticism".

The art of Ajantā and Bāgh shows the Madhyadeśa school of painting at its best. It captured in itself the best traditions of the art renaissance at home and set up traditions which travelled to far off countries, such as Central Asia, China, Korea, Japan and Burma. It became the cosmopolitan art of the Buddhist world and seems to have gone with Buddhism wherever it went. The discovery of frescoes in Central Asia, in Khotan, at Turfan, at Tunhuang have only served to focus greater attention on the frescoes of Ajantā.

The earliest Brahmanical paintings so far known, are the fragments found in Cave III of Bādāmi (dated, 578 A.D.). The cave is Vishṇuite but the paintings themselves seem to depict Śaivaite subjects though most of them are now so badly multilated that nothing can be said for certain. The remainings do not suggest that they ever reached the standard of Ajantā or even Bāgh.

TERRACOTTA :

Terracotta sculptures formed another important branch of Gupta art. Stone and metal images were costly and for this reason did not cater to the needs of the vast majority of the population. They needed idols and images for their day to day use which were less expensive and more easily available. Hence,

the great demand for terracotta figures which have been found in abundance particularly in the Ganga-Jumnā Valley and Bengal where the riverine plains ensured an inexhaustible source for malleable earth and clay. Small in size these terracotta figurines were usually produced from sketchy moulds in large quantities and were normally not very carefully finished by chiselling before and after baking or burning. From the traces of colour on a large number of specimens from Rājghāt (near Banares), Ahichehhatra, Bhiṭā and other places, it seems that painted terracottas were also quite common, colours usually employed being red ochre, pink, yellow and white. Kālidāsa in his Aviñāna Śakuntalam refers to one such painted terracotta peacock (*Chitrita-mrittikā-mayura*).

Terracotta plaques and figurines of the period under review were found mainly from Harvan (Kāśmire); Sahri Barhlol, Takht-i-Bahi and Jamalgarhi (Punjab); Hanumangarh and Bikanir (Rajputana); Brahmanabad and Mirpur Khās (Sind); Saheth Maheth (Sravastī); Kāśia (Kusinagara), Bhitargaon; Bhiṭā; Basrah (Vaiśālī); Kosām (Kausāmbi); Ahichihhatra, Rājghāt, Pawaya, Patna, Mahāsthān Gorh and Bangardh.

Terracotta plaques and reliefs were made and employed for both secular and religious purposes. People often decorated the exterior walls of their residences with fine and richly laid terracotta reliefs depicting gods and goddesses, *Gandharvas* and *Apsarās*, characters from Epics and Purāṇas as well as animals of various kinds. Contemporary writing show that many people had their bed chambers adorned with terracotta plaques of a amorous couples, portrait heads, toys of various kinds, human and animal figures and beautiful female figurines. The people, particularly the women, were also fond of using different types of clay models for *Vratas* (socio-religious rites) and *Pujas*. Most of these models have either been immersed (*Bisarjan*) after the ceremony was over or were destroyed in course of time.

The artists who moulded these clay figurines were all local people and mostly ignorant of the iconographic injunctions and religious dictates laid down in the Samskrit texts. Hence, they had an opportunity to give their imaginations, ideas and actions an immensely playful and joyous freedom. Passing moods, contemporary tests, fashions and prejudices which had less scope in stone sculpture and even painting, registered themselves in the plastic idiom of the age. "Men and women of every economic strata—from blue blooded aristocrats and foreigners to beggars and mendicants including dancers and sanke charmers, dwarfs, acrobats and elephant riders—were represented." A student of Gupta social history would greatly benefit from a systematic study of these terracotta figures. They depicted the tastes and cultures of the masses. There was nothing divine or other worldly about them ; they were instead vigorous, real and life like.

The age of the Imperial Guptas witnessed the climax of a development in the field of Indian art that had its beginning in the culture of the Indus Valley and the Aryans. In architecture, painting, sculpture and folk art, the period witnessed a tremendous burst of activity which fulfilled the past aspiration as well as set new patterns of growth which matured in the centuries that followed. The period was a link between the past and the future, a Classical Age in the best sense of that word.

Chapter III

EDUCATION AND LEARNING

GUPTA PERIOD :

We are here dealing with formal education and learning (or an organized system of teaching and learning). It should, however, be remembered that education need not necessarily mean formal education and that one does not always need an academic qualification to be educated. Rather there is a difference between schooling and education and proficiency in the former does not always guarantee the benefits normally associated with the latter, so that education in a broader sense can be better identified with maturity rather than with plain erudition. However, it is not within the scope of this monograph to assess how educated the average man in ancient India was on the basis of his maturity. It would then have to be assessed on the basis of how advanced civilization was at that period of time in India, since education and civilization are at least somewhat, if not to a large extent, related. But this would lead us further and further away from what is generally understood by the term education and it would be increasingly difficult to reconcile the subject with the topic, which is why in this work we will limit ourselves to the state of formal education and learning in ancient India.

To start at the very beginning, education in this country must have begun with the Indus valley civilization as far back as cir. 2500 B.C. These people used a semi-pictographic form of writing, so there must have at-least been some among them who were literate. But unfortunately this is as far as our knowledge goes, for we know nothing more of their system of education.

A regular system of education was, however, introduced by the early Vedic Indians round about 1500 B.C. Definite codes on the subject were laid down in the law books and it is possible for us to see how this system worked.

The academic career of the Aryan boy began after his initiation through the Upanayana ceremony whereby he became a full member of his class and society. Today this Upanayana ceremony is the same as the sacred thread (or *Poitay*) ceremony that a Brāhmin boy undergoes. Previously this rite was open to all except the lower castes, the ideal age for the purpose varying from 8 for a Brāhmana to all for a Kshatriya and 12 for a Vaiśya. They were called the twice born, but since this term came to be applied more and more often to the Brāhmanas only, it must be assumed that the practice died out with the other castes. This took place, when he was about eight years old, but though a minor, he had taken the status of an Āryan, and it was now his duty to master the religious lore of the Āryans in order to prepare himself for the role of a householder.

According to the ideal of the sacred texts, the training of the Brahmacharin (for the boy still had to remain celibate until he had completed his tenure of study) took place at the home of a Brāhmana teacher (or *guru.*) He was, now, totally at the disposal of the latter and was expected to treat his master with the utmost reverence, ministering to all his needs and obeying all his commands implicitly. He began by learning how to perform various religious rites which were incumbent upon all the twice born and to a certain degree are still performed today.

The main subject of study was the Veda, and long hours were devoted to its mastery. The teacher would instruct the few students seated on the ground about him by rote and for many hours daily they would repeat verse after verse of the Vedas until one or more was mastered. Sometimes to

ensure correctness, the hymns were taught in more than one way with various aids to memorization. This system of mnemonic checks and the patience and brilliant memories of many generations of teachers and students preserved the Vedas for posterity in much the same as that in which they existed nearly a thousand years before Christ.

The boys in the *guru's* home did not confine their attention wholly to the Vedic texts. There were other fields of study, notably the 'Limbs of the Vedas', or subsidiary sciences necessary for its proper understanding. These six Vedāṅgas consisted of '*Kalpa*', the performance of sacrifice, '*Śiksā*', correct pronounciation or phonetics ; '*chandas*', metre and prosody ; '*nirukta*', etymology, the interpretation of obscure words in the Vedic texts ; *Vyākaraṇa*, (grammer) ; and *jyōtisa*, astronomy, the science of the calendar, etc. Moreover, in post-Vedic times teachers would instruct their students in the six schools of metaphysics, or in that school they specially favoured. Those versed in the sacred Law would expound it to their students, while others would teach special secular subjects, such as, astronomy, mathematics or literature. There were, however, more branches of study, eight different schools being referred to in the Purāṇas. They were *Agnisthāna*, place of fire worship. *Brahmasthāna*, place of Vedic learning, *Vishṇu-sthāna*, place for learning polity, economics and acquiring information, *Mahendrasthāna*, place for learning the art of warfare, *Vivasvatasthana*, astrology, *Samasthāna*, botany, *Garuḍasthāna*, place for learning of transport and other means of communication, *Kārtikayasthāna*, place for learning the parade of soldiers and the art of warfare. These courses of study being rather extensive in themselves, it was not possible for any one person to master all of them so that herein we may suggest the beginnings of specialization in education.

The writers of Smriti envisaged all young men of the upper class as undergoing this training, but such was not the case. In fact it is doubtful, if more than a small proportion of young men

ever went through a full course of Vedic education. Princes and the sons of chiefs and nobles were trained in arms and all the manifold sciences needed to fit them for Government services, while most boys of the lower orders probably learnt their trades from their father. The Buddhist scriptures infact show that there was a form of apprenticeship, and the law books lay down rules governing it.

We might here in parenthesis include a small note on caste and its effect on education. In course of time Indian society came to centre round the caste system and as a natural corollary to it education too came to be caste oriented from the later Vedic and Epic periods. Teaching had at first been open to all, but in due course became a "total Brāhmana preserve covering" both religious as well as secular studies. Even in learning the Kshatṛyas were now relegated to the study of methods of Government and warfare ; the Brāhmana reserved for themselves the right to study and teach, to scrifice and to give and receive gifts, that is, their studies were more or less religious oriented ; the Vaiśyas, again, in keeping with the duties and function of their castes, had to prepare themselves for a career in trade, farming or industry, while it was the duty of the Śudras to serve the three higher castes and their education was fashioned accordingly. It was not thought necessary for the remainder, i.e. the outcastes, to have any short of education. Thus, each caste was educated to perform the functions it had been assigned in society.

Apart from the houses (or *Āśrams*) of the various *gurus*, as centres of education, certain cities became renowned for their learned teachers, and achieved a reputation comparable to that of the University cities of medieval Europe. Chief among these were Vārānasi and Takshasila (Taxila), which were already famous in the time of the Buddha ; later around the beginning of the Christian era, Kāñchi acquired a similar reputation in the south. Vārānasi then called Kāsi was particularly renowned for its religious teachers, but Taxila in the far north

west, laid more emphasis on secular studies. Among the famous men connected with Taxila were Pāṇiṇi, the grammarian of the 4th century B.C, Kauṭilya, the Brāhmaṇa minister of Chandragupta Maurya, and traditionally the Chief master of the science of state craft, and Caraka, one of the two great masters of Indian medical science. These University towns were veritable colleges and must be considered more advanced than the individual *Āsrams*, catering as they did to a tertiary state of education as it were.

Simultaneously with the spread of Buddhism and Jainism education came to be centred not in the teachers' home, but in the various monasteries (or Vihāras) as well. The postulants there were instructed in their various *dhammas* in certain institution, such as, Nālandā, there was scope for specialization, not only in the different branches of the Buddhist and Jaina canons, but also in the Vedas, Hindu Philosophy and the secular sciences. It would seem that the student population was not confined to the Buddhist order but that candidates of other faiths who succeeded in passing a strict oral examination were admitted.

Of these Buddhist centre of learning, the best known was the monastery at Nālandā. It was founded under the patronage of the Imperial Guptas and became the chief centre of learning in the country under Harshabardhan, until it was finally destroyed by Muslim invaders in the middle ages.

We might note here that the teaching of Buddhism was not limited to India, but also exported abroad. During the second, third and fourth centuries A.D. we are told that a number of monks went to China to translate Buddhist *sutras*. thus, no doubt, making an important contribution to Sino-Indian friendship. Though our records speak only of the spread of Buddhist teachings in China, this branch of Indian Philosophy must have been carried to other parts of Asia as well.

TEACHER STUDENT RELATIONS:

According to the Smrities and the testimony of the Chinese pilgrim I—Tsing the relationship between teacher and student was always cordial and this spirit was carried down to the *Toals, Maktabs* and *Mādrāssās* where it was much in evidence at a much later date. The word 'cordial' is important ; it means 'hearty', but if above texts meant to use it in this sense, it does not all tally with the rigid, authoritarian relationship between teacher and student that they go on to describe. If on the other hand 'cordial' is taken to mean 'Polite' as it is generally done today, then it is in the present context a gross under-statement as we may presently see.

The above texts go on to say that "the relation between the teacher and the taught was just like a father and a son." Living, as the student did, in the house of his *guru* and becoming, as it were a member of the household, this might well have been so. But the relationship between father and son and even between teacher and student, if the situation till very recently can be taken to be a pointer, was far from hearty. On the contrary, it bordered on abject servility, so much so that it was considered almost criminal to disobey one's elders and if perchance anyone dared do the unthinkable he not only risked social ostracism but might proportionately also jeopardize his chances of attaining *nirvāna.* Likewise the teacher vas venerated throughout India and this is still true in many parts of the country. Thus, basing ourself on these deduction we think it would be more correct to say that the feeling evinced by the student, for this *guru* was one of reverence, while the latter regarded his charge with condescension.

In order to maintain this relationship Yājñavalkya suggest that "the student must be grateful, not inclined to hate or prove false to his teacher, happy and not disposed to find fault. They should always be dependent and under the control of their teachers". This is further supplemented by

Nārada who says that "the students should stay only with their teachers". We shall not attempt to assess how successful the teachers of ancient India were in maintaining these stringent psychological requirements. We doubt, whether it would be possible for any rational person to except these standards and yet be honest with himself. Nevertheless, without going into details it is possible to see that the mores governing teacher-student relations did not encourage independent thought and difinitely not criticism—two very important necessities in the development of any rational philosophy. Perhaps, this is one reason, why Indian thought, after its initial outburst, gradually calcified, leaving the west to develop and more important continuously improve upon its ideas. This, however, is not to deny that Indian learning made absolutely no progress. As the Śyrian astronomer-monk, '*Severus Sebokht*' writing in A.D. 662 says, "I shall not now speak of the knowledge of the Hindus,..................of their suitable discoveries in the science of astronomy—discoveries even more ingenious than that of the Greeks and Babylonians of their rational system of mathematics, or of their method of calculation which no words can praise strongly enough...." This is high praise for Hindu learning, but one gets the impression that the ancients could have gone much further and maintained this lead had they not been hampered by the obligation to unquestioningly accept the written words.

The Smrities further enlighten us on student-teacher relations by suggesting that disobedient students like disobedient sons should be "punished physically". This could range from partial starvation to flogging, though Nārada promptly reveals the magnanimity of the ancients by adding that the unfortunate culprit should not be flogged on the head or chest, but only on the back and that too not in excess.

I-Tsing, the Chinese pilgrims give us some more information on the subject. He points out that the student was

expected to help with the domestic chores in the *guru*'s household. For example, he was to fold the teacher's clothes, sweep out the house and yard, draw the drinking water for his master and nurse him in sickness. The teacher on his part would look after all the needs of his charge,—mental, physical, and presumably spiritual. He was, moreover, to remain celibate, as long as, he was with his *guru* and was to pay "due homage and respect" to both him as well as the elders in the house. In most cases no money was taken from the student, the service rendered by him being considered fees enough, though as Manu points out, there were certain exception.

In this context it might be well worth while to include some observations by thinkers and writers like Kālidāsa on the subject. He says, "knowledge imparted to a good pupil does not cause repentence ; that the teaching of the dullard sharpens the intellect of the teacher." Gaṇadāsa further adds "instruction is good only when it stands the test in the presence of wise men, as gold is tested by means of fire", and again, "knowledge is to be esteemed for its own sake. He is a trader in learning who uses it only for earning his livelihood." These guiding precepts go to show some of the ideals that lay behind the teaching of a student in ancient India.

SOME CENTRES OF STUDY

NĀLANDĀ :

As we have noted elsewhere, every Buddhist and Jaina monastery (Vihāra) was a centre of religious and secular learning, now Fa-Hien, the Chinese pilgrim has left behind an exhaustive list of monasteries which by applying the last noted equation may be assumed to have all been centres of learning. Among the better known are Udyana, Suvastu, Gandhāra, Taxila, Purushapura, Nagarahāra, Mathurā, Saṃkāsya, Kanyakubja, Kośala, Jatavanavihāra, Kapilāvāstu

Rāmagrāma, Kushinagara, Vaiśālī, Pāṭaliputra, Rājagṛiha, Gayā, Vārānasi, Kausāmbi, Champā and Tāmralipta. In this list, however, the monastery of Nālandā is conspicuous in its absence. This is because Fa-hien was in India during the reign of Chandra Gupta II whereas the Uuiversity of Nālandā was established under the patronage of the later Guptas. Buddha Gupta, Tathāgata Gupta, Narasiṁha Gupta Bālāditya being among its patrons. Hiuen-Tsang, a later pilgrim, however, makes up for this deficiency and has left behind copius information as the University.

Nālandā first appears in tradition as the birth place of Sāriputta, whose *chaitya* Aśoka is said to have seen. But its fame lies essentially with the great University that was founded there, its rise coinciding with the rise of Mahāyana Buddhism. By the end of the fourth century A.D. the popularity of Nālandā Mahāvihāra as a centre of religious education and culture had reached far and wide and attracted scholars from both within and outside the country. We have references to Āchārya Nāgārjuna and his pupil Ārya Deva from the south ; he spent a considerable period of time at Nālandā. Their contemporary Suvishṇu erected "108 temples for the conservation of Abhidarma" Pitaka, while in 400 A.D. we are told that the famous Buddhist logician Diṅnāga was invited by the University to a debate with the Brāhmana Sudurjaya and his associates. The presence of these celebrities no doubt enhanced the prestige of the place which was further augmented by its many impressive buildings which were the result of generous Gupta patronage. This surmise is corroborated by Hiuen-Tsang who adds that Nālandā was a residential University and an attractive one at that time. The students incidentally enjoyed free board and lodging and were not required to pay for their tuition either.

In this context it might be noted that residential Universities seem to cater to a selected few, which in this context

would mean those who were truly interested in the subject concerned. This is contrary to the present Indian notion whereby a University is supposed to provide a standard education for the general local populace.

From what we learn from Hiuen-Tsang the University of Taxila was noted for its school of medicine, that of Ujjaini for astronomy, and that of Benaras for orthodox Brahmanical learning. But the greatest and most celebrated of all these Universities was that of Nālandā. Though it was a great centre of Buddhist learning, it offered a comprehensive couse of study which included the study of the Vedas, Vedāṅgas, Philosophy, Grammar, Śabda-Vidyā, Hetu-Vidyā, Yogasāśtra, Logic, the Upanishads, Mimāṁsa, the Dharmasāśtras, Itihāsa-Purāṇas, Medicine, Mathematics, and the so called sixty four arts. We are told that the standard of education was very high and that applicants were subjected to an oral test which they had to pass in order to be admitted. Hiuen-Tsang confirms this observing that though there were many foreign applicants only a few gained admission to the more advanced courses. Strict discipline was maintained and inmates could be expelled for misconduct or indiscipline. All this we learn from Hiuen-Tsang who was himself a student of Nālandā for five years studying the various branches of knowledge especially, Mahāyana doctrines and philosophy. During his stay he claims that there were ten thousand students (or bretheren), at the University, but as Dr. Basham says, "The remains of Nālandā, however, belie Hiuen-Tsang. The monastery consisted of a very large complex of buildings, but it cloud hardly have accommodated a thousand monks in anything like the comfort described by the Chinese traveller." "Bearing the unreliability of his figures in mind," Hiuen-Tsang then goes on to say that of these ten thousand, "one thousand were proficient in ten works of the *Sutras* and *Śāstras* ; five hundred had graduated in thirty works, ten only including himself in fifty works, while Silabhadra, the saintly abbot of the monastery was the only master of all the works." These

figures are no doubt inflated but serve to give some idea of the standard of proficiency reached. Other famous teachers of this institute were, Jnānachandra, Dharmapāla, Chandrapāla, Gunamatī, Sthiramatī, Probhamitra and Jinamitra. The students spent all their time in study and discussion "helping", as we are told "each other to perfection". Lectures on various topics were delivered to them from about a hundred different pulpits everyday, and judging from the atmosphere Hiuen-Tsang was probably not exaggerating, when he said that students considered them so important that they did not miss them even for a minute.

Such a system was bound to produce a very learned set of people who carried with them all the respect that would go with a prestigous institution of this sort. Hiuen-Tsang says that the Nālandā Mahāvihāra had acquired such a reputation that all those who claimed to be a "Nālandā brother" were treated with respect wherever they went, also an example of the great respect the people of India have had for learning and learned men.

Sometime after the Gupta period, Harshavardhana of Kānyakubja became the great patron of Nālandā. It is said that he used to earmak a fourth of the revenue from the crown lands for rewarding great scholars. Next to the main building he erected another magnificent house over a hundred feet in height and dedicated it to the University. Moreover, he remitted the revenue of about a hundred villages to the University for supplying the students with cloths, food, bedding and medicine. Under such patronage Nālandā was bound to flourish.

UJJAINI :

Ujjaini was another great centre of culture and learning, but not so much of a homogenous unit like Nālandā. It was perhaps the home of the great poet Kālidāsa who is believed

to have been the court poet of Chandra Gupta II Vikramāditya. After the Śaka War, Chandra Gupta brought great tracts of Western India under Gupta rule and some historians have suggested that his fascination for this ancient city of Ujjaini was one motive for his having done so. In any case he was deeply committed to its development and was proud to be called "Ujjaini-Puravara-Adhisvara."

VALABHI MAHĀVIHĀRA :

Valabhi Mahavihara was another great centre of learning. Princes Dudda a neice of Dhruva I had erected a Vihāra there and subsequently in 580 A.D. another Vihāra was constructed there by Dharasena I. Thus as a result of royal patronage we are told that Valabhi was able to acquire a good library and both I-Tsing and Hiuen-Tsang have spoken highly of both its teachers and its system of teaching.

THE STATE OF EDUCATION :

While discussing the state of education in the country during the Gupta period, it must be noted that lack of adequate material forces us to confine ourselves to the state of education in the royal households of the day. There might, however, be some truth in assuming that here, that is in the royal families, and among the aritocracy, was where most education lay, though this no doubt was not the whole truth. Nevertheless, to go back to what we do know.

Kālidāsa and his literary contemporaries speak very highly of the literary achievements of royalty, but a more sober view causes us to believe that these literateurs were more often than not carried away in flights of poetic fancy. Samudra Gupta, if Harisena's Allahabad *prasasti* is to be believed, was a '*Kavirāja*' (a king of poets), though this is the only evidence we have of his parported literary abilities. However, if the kings themselves were not literary giants, there is ample evidence to show that they did support and encourage literary

genius. The court of Chandra Gupta II is said to have been graced by "the nine gems", presumably men of great artistic ability, since the analogy seems to be with a similar cotorie maintained by the Mughal emperor Akbar ; of whom Kālidāsa was one, while the Vākāṭaka king, Pravarasena II is believed to have composed the Setubandah Kāvya in Mahārāstri prakrit. Harṣhavardhana, too, was not exempt from these literary yearnings either, and is said to have written the Nāgananda, the Priyadarsikā and the Ratnāvalī.

The great interest shown by these ancient rulers in the arts was not slow to rub off on their families and interestingly enough, the female members therein. From what we learn from contemporary literature, the ladies of the arisocracy were first given a grounding in general knowledge and then trained by experts in reading, writing, singing, dancing and various other accomplishments. We might in this context discuss the state of the education of women in the country at that time.

THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN :

It was then believed that the true function of women was marriage, and the care of their men folk and children. As a result of it their higher education suffered considerably, although Vātsyāna suggests that the daughters of the nobility should be well versed in the Kāma-Sutra and the sixty four arts, while housewives should at least know how to handle the family budget and daily expenses. Nevertheless, the better class of women seem to have been educated, and there are several references in the works of Sanskrit poetry and drama by women author of which some fragments survive. In Tāmil the early poettess Avvaiyar has left work of much merit, and a splendid material ode describing the great victory of the early Chola king Karikala at Veñi is ascribed to an unnamed potter's wife. In Kālidāsa's play, Mālavikā-Agnimitra there is a reference to a lady Kausiki, who though a fictitious character well illustrates the accomplishments an educated lady of the time could achieve. She was

learned, could speak Sanskrit, was tactful and most certainly very sensitive, because she seems to be a good critic of the arts of singing, dancing, and drama. Speaking of Mālavikā's ability as a dancer, she points out that her gestures are very expressive, that the movements of her feet are harmonious, and that the sentiment she want to convey engrosses her completely. She was acquainted with the science of medicine and as far as education was concerned, could distinguish between a teacher who know his matter but could not express himself, and one who did not have quite so much knowledge but could get it across to his pupils very well. Kausiki was to be sure only a character in a play but she does reflect the culture and graciouness a cultured lady of the time was able to develop.

As we have noted the ladies of Sanskrit courtly literature are often described as reading, writing and composing songs, and they seem to have been well versed in the arts of the time. Moreover, though from medieval times until very recent years the arts of music and dancing were looked on as quite unfit for respectable Indian girls, and were only practised by low-caste women and prostitutes, this was not the case in ancient days, when well to-do girls were taught singing and dancing as well as other lady like arts, such as, painting and garland-making. We may, thus, presume that ladies from well to do families were to varying degrees, educated, if not in all the branches of learning, at least in the feminine arts. As for the rest of womenkind we will have to assume untill informed to the contrary that they, judging from the social structure, were trained only to look after their families and were, therefore by our definition, uneducated.

GENERAL STANDARD OF EDUCATION :

To go back to the general state of education in the country, we have another index to the level of education, and that is the use of Sanskrit. It must be remembered that the general

populace spoke prakrit or the different regional languages, whereas, it was only the educated who used Sanskrit, it being the language of the learned. Here, an apt analogy may be made with the use of Latin in relation to the various vernacular languages in medieval Europe. We are told that the king, his ministers, high officials, generals, hermits, Kaunchuki, harbots, charioteers, stage-managers (*Sutradhara*), the actors and dancing masters like Gaṇadāsa and Haradatta, used Sanskrit. On the other hand, the Vidushaka (or jester), the gate-keeper, the constabulary, the fisherman, and the ordinary women and children spoke Prakrit. The inference here would, therefore, be that people connected with the court, with religion and University and with the arts used Sanskrit, while the lesser people in the more mundane walks of life used Prakrit. It has, however, been pointed out that people using Prakrit could often understand Sanskrit, though they might not have been able to read or write in the language.

The results of the education received may also be seen in the numerous inscriptions left behind by the Guptas. The Allahabad Prasasti, a eulogy composed by Samudragupta's minister of War and Peace, Harisena, is, apart from being a very informative record of Samudragupta's doings, also a fine piece of literature. Similarly, Vatsabhaṭṭi, the author of the Māndāsor inscription of Kumāragupta I and Bandhubarman made another literary contribution in Sanskrit. Judging from these and the other Gupta inscriptions, the prose and *Kāvya* style had matured in the hands of the host of writers. The legends on the Gupta coins, too, go to show some of this maturity in style.

So great was the intellectual activity in the Gupta age, that it has sometimes been called the period of the Hindu Renaissance, and in fact it does bear some resemblance to England under the Tudors. In literature, there was the great poet Kālidāsa, whom incidentally Prof. Rawlinson calls, "the Indian Shakespeare", whose brilliance unfortunately

has caused other writers of lesser merit like Sudraka and Visākhadatta to be almost totally forgotten. The sprat of literary activity can also be seen in the many works of literature composed in this period. In the fields of mathematics and astronomy which was peopled by such great thinkers as Āryabhatta and Varāhamihira, Indian discoveries received ample recognition throughout the civilized world. Knowledge was coveted, and Hiuen Tsang writing in the seventh century A.D. was impressed by a class of wandering '*bhikshus*' (religious beggars) who acquired wisdom through constant travel and were not tempted to forsake this seeking even by the favours and honours bestowed by kings.

But the Chinese pilgrim would, in the case of educational institutions, agree that the hey day of the Buddhist and Jaina Vihāras, with the possible exception of Nālandā and a few others, were gradually passing away. The Buddhist system of education which had been open to all on merit was slowly supplimented by the older Brāhmanical culture and system of education. The caste system was, in course of time, growing increasingly rigid, and education came to be confined by religious law to the Brāhmana and other higher castes of society. The Śudras, the outcaste caused by intercaste marriage, and the tribal people were completely debarred from education and were restricted to learning the profession assigned to them by Brāhmin law. The newly instituted system of child marriage, moreover, further cramped the opportunities open to the education of women, mass education, if it could ever be called that, thus came to be restricted to a certain class of people, who alone were considered pure enough to receive and pass on the knowledge of the Vedas. Then, came the Moslem invasions which wiped out in this country the last remaining vestiges of Buddhist education. Brahminism prevailed. To-day Brahminism is a much maligned philosophy, but it must be said to its credit that through its strict laws it was at least able to preserve for posterity, something of the great culture India had once enjoyed.

Chapter IV.

COINAGE AND CULTURE.

Ancient India saw her golden age under the banner of the Guptas and the root of the Hindu civilisation took its strong hold in this period. "An impartial historian" said Havell, "might well consider that the greatest triumph of British administration would be to restore to India all that she enjoyed in the fifth century A.D."

In the realm of numismatics, conservatism was a very strong force in ancient times, the early gold issues of the Guptas, therefore, closely resembled those of the later Kushāṇas to whose imperial position they succeeded in the north. The obverse of the Kushāṇa prototype of gold coins, —the king standing and offering incense at the altar, is very common in the earlier stages of the Gupta coinage. The Hindu king is also to be seen wearing the Kushāṇa overcoat and trousers. His name is written perpendicularly under the arm as on the Kushāṇa prototype. There was, however, a definite move to Hinduise the type soon afterwards. The coins of the Archer type of Samudragupta and the Battle axe, Couch, Tiger-slayer and Aśvamedha types are quite original in their conception and show no foreign influence whatsoever. Their execution is generally very fine and the high water-mark of Hindu numismatic art may be seen in the Aśvamedha type of Samudragupta and the lion-slayer type of Chandragupta II which are by far the best specimens of coins struck in ancient India. The art, however, began to decline in the reign of Kumāragupta I. The latter no doubt introduced two new types,—the Peacock type and the Elephant rider type but his coins show a definite artistic deterioration which was later accentuated by the declining fortunes of the empire.

Chandragupta I is the earliest Hindu ruler whose inscribed gold coins have been handed down to us. No ruler either of the Mauryas or the Suṅgas or the Sātavāhana dynasty issued any gold coins. The practice was started by the foreign Greek and Kushāṇa rulers and Chandragupta I was the first national king to adopt it. Probably he started his gold coinage at the time, when he assumed the Imperial title. This took place rather late in his reign, when his conquests had invested him with sufficient importance. On his gold coins we have the names and figures of the king and the queen on the obverse and the name of the Lichchhavis on the reverse. It is clear that in spite of the growing greatness of the Guptas the Lichchhavis might have insisted in maintaining their separate identity in the dual kingdoms. We have not yet got a single coin of Chandragupta I where the name of the Lichchhavi clan and princess does not appear on the reverse and obverse respectively. Samudragupta paid considerable attention to his coinage. He was not content to issue coins in a single type. He introduced a pleasing variety in his coin types and his example was emulated by his successors as a consequence of which we possess in Gupta gold issues the most artistic series of gold coins. ever issued in ancient India. So far seven coin types of Samudragupta are known. Of these the Standard, the Archer and the Battle-axe types refer to his military activities and the Aśvamedha type commemorate their successful culmination. The other two types give us a glimpse into some of the hobbies of the great emperor. The Tiger slayer type shows that the emperor took keen interest in wild game and the Lyrist type discloses how he used to spend his rare leisure hours in his palace in playing on the lute. The statement of Harisena, that his patron excelled Tambaru in musical skill, was thus not without some foundation. Whether Samudragupta composed any poems we do not know. But there is no doubt that he is the first king in ancient Indian history to introduce metrical legends on coins.

The reign of Chandragupta II is remarkable for its numismatic novelty. Minting of gold coins was done more extensively during his rule than in any prior or later reign. Chandragupta II's silver coins are few. The silver currency was confined to the new provinces of the empire during the reign of Chandragupta II. This Emperor also started using copper coins. During the greater part of the reign of Kumāragupta I there was tranquility and prosperity in the empire which is reflected in his coinage. His gold coinage is extensive and shows as many as fourteen types. Their artistic merit is high and many of their metrical legends have considerable poetical merit as well. He extended the silver currency to the Gangetic plain and issued for his home province a new type of silver currency showing no traces of foreign influence. He, however, practically discontinued the issue of the copper currency. People were generally accustomed to the use of cowries for small daily transactions. Kumāragupta I probably thought that copper currency was hardly worth the trouble and expense it involved. Gupta mints were fairly active during the reign of Skandagupta. His silver coinage is as copious as that of his father, he supplanted some of its types by introducing new ones like the Bull and the Altar types. But his gold coinage is much less copious and shows only three certain types. The financial strain of the Hūṇa war had also told upon the treasury, for many of his gold coins are heavily adulterated. Among the later Guptas, Kumāragupta II has left us a numerous gold coin. But they are all heavily adulterated, gold being only about 57%.

So far Indologists have studied Gupta coins mainly for the sake of political history. But their value for the study of the life and culture of that period should not be ignored. One of the functions of money is that it serves as a store of value. In ancient India, when banking system was very crude and under-developed, hoarding was a common practice. As many as 16 hoards of Gupta coins have so far been discovered from different parts of the empire. The great majority of the

obverse legends of the coins of the Guptas have not been hitherto satisfactorily explained. As a rule each specimen only contains a few words of the legend, it is rare to find legible vowel marks. While a number of legends must await decipherment until further specimens are available the majority cannot be read with certainty.

During the age of the Guptas usually the emperor resigned independently in his own right. But there were certain exceptions to this usage. Chandragupta I, the first sovereign of the Gupta dynasty ruled his kingdom giving due importance to his Lichchhavi queen Kumāradevī as their names and effigies appear on their coins probably as the result of a political compromise. This coin shows on the obverse Chandragupta I standing to the left wearing close fitting coat, trousers and head-dress, earrings and armlet holding in left hand a crescent-topped standard bound with fillet and with right hand offering an object which on some coins is clearly a ring to Kumāradevī who is wearing loose robe, earrings, necklace and armlets and high fitting head dress. Only in the Aśvamedha type of coins issued by Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I are found the image of his chief queen.

Chandragupta II, we all know, was a great devotee of Vishṇu. But no one had ever thought that he might have issued a coin type showing himself as a direct recipient of *prasāda* from Vishṇu manifesting himself before his royal devotee for that purpose. And yet this is what we visualise on the single coin of the unique Chakra-Vikrama type for the first time disclosed in the Bayana hoard. The Bayana hoard also shows that Kumāragupta I was perhaps the greatest devotee of the science of Numismatics in the Gupta dynasty, for it discloses for the first time as many as 5 new types, such as the King and the queen, the Chhatra type, the Lyrist type, the Rhinoceros slayer type and the Elephant-rider-lion slayer type. The people of this age had their own indoor as well as outdoor games. Hunting was probably an aristocratic amusement.

An important feature of royal life at this age was the institution of umbrella bearers. At Ajantā along with this royal umbrella can also be seen the other attributes of royalty,—the fly-whisk and the foot-stool. A royal umbrella (or parasol) is the symbol of supremacy. This parasol which was the emblem of royalty can be seen on several Gupta coins which are styled as coins of the Chhatra type. On such coins of Chandragupta II the emperor is seen standing with his left hand resting on his sword-hilt, while behind him is a dwarf attendant holding the royal parasol over him. It is not unreasonable to assume that the king appeared and departed in public especially in an Assembly Hall in this manner.

Gupta gold coins supply a rich material for the study of contemporary costumes, weapons, furniture and horse accoutrement. The Gupta period is not only distinguished for its political achievements but also for its art, architecture and other spheres of material culture. To take an instance the fashions in hair-dressing costumes and ornaments in this period show an artistic trend of mind which delighted in elegant innovations. The artistic arrangement of pleats and folds of *dhoti* and *śarī*, the graceful way of wearing *dupāṭṭā* and the carefully arranged knots of *kamarbanda* testify that the people were not unaware of the aesthetics of dressing. For the study of Indian costume in the Gupta period there are a very large number of Gupta coins bearing the portraits of kings, queens and goddesses. A very significant fact in the costume of the kings is that they wear tunics and trousers like the Kushāṇa kings, though goddesses and queens appear in purely national costume. The convenience and also the elegant art of sewn garments must have appealed to the highly artistic but practical commonsense of the Guptas. The coarseness and heavy barbaric art of the Kushāṇa garments gave place to elegance and finish. In this age the top boots of the Kushāṇas also lost their heaviness and were reduced to the shape of modern riding boots. The adoption of sewn garments by the horse riders and a section of soldiers of the Gupta period also reveal Śaka

influence. The common articles of wear in Gupta costume are *dhoti*, *dupaṭṭā*, *śārī* and *kamarbanda*. The sewn garments of a woman is called *chola* and *kurpasaka*. *Chola* seems to have been a tunic and *kurpasaka* seems to have been a close fitting bodice. Both of them appear on Gupta coins. The costume of a Gupta king is described in the Mudrārākshasha as *varabaṇa* decorated with the circles of pearls and jewels, *tiara* and the flower garland worn across the chest. There is little doubt that *varabaṇa* here is the same as the tunic with pointed ends appearing on Gupta coins. The circles on them indicate the decoration of pearls and jewels. The method of wearing *dhoti* is common on the coin portraits. The *dhoti* had its one corner set in front a little below the navel, the pleated end was tucked behind and it was so girt up as to show a part of the thighs. Usually the kings on Gupta coins are shown wearing full boots decorated with buttons. On the authority of the Brihat Kalpa-sutra Bhāsya these boots could be identified with *khallaka*, *ardha-khallaka*, *khapusa* and *jaingha* types. Apparently these shoes had fasteners. An analysis of the costumes of the kings and queens and the goddesses reveal the following interesting details.

Chandragupta I wears a helmet or close-fitting cap which is usually beaded and tunic with pointed ends with embroidered front or neck. At one place traces of oblique lines perhaps indicate fastings. He either wears trousers or *dhoti* with a pleated corner dangling between the legs and boots reaching a a little below the knees. His tunic was often secured with a *kamarbanda*. The dress of Samudragupta is more varied. In Archer type he either wears a beaded skull cap often decorated with streamer which was hemispherical, conical or peacked. He usually wears the tunic with pointed ends secured by a *kamarbanda* (or a belt). He wears trousers of *churidār* type, trousers with pleats and *shalwars*. He also wears *dhoti* in combination with the tunic and *dupaṭṭā*. The buttoned top boots are worn. In Lyrist type he merely wears a skull cap and a short *dhoti*. These are suitable clothes, when the king

is in his private chamber. In the Archer type he wears a turban with a plaque, tight fitting tunic, *kamarbanda* and *dhoti*. In Lion slayer type the dress appropriate to the occasion is simple. The king wears a flowered cap, light turban with a plaque, head scarf, half sleeved tunic without pointed ends, shorts, *dhoti*, *langot* and *kamarbanda*.

Coins also give us a pitcure of the furnitures and weapons used during the Classical age. There are many kinds of stools with machine turned like legs. Their forms are either rectangular or oblong. Some of the *sofās* are provided with high backs and were probably *cushioned*. The bed resembles its modern prototype. It was at times provided with a back. The *moḍhā* or *asandi* seems to have been used very extensively. It was hour glass shaped or bell shaped. The *moḍha* which was apparently made of cane was decorated with zig zag and leafy pattern. The umbrella was a simple affair without ribs. The Gupta coins also represent certain interesting types of weapons. The recurved bows are of many kinds. The battle axes, swords and knives have also been represented in different forms.

T. S. Eliot in his brilliant set of essays which he called the Notes Towards the Definition of Culture says "no culture has appeared or developed except together with a religion ; according to the point of view of the observer the culture will appear to be the product of the religion or the religion the product of the culture." So the primitive and ancient culture of a people are considerably reflected through their religious outlook and their religious history is very much indebted to science of Numismatics, since it enables us to trace the evolution of religious movements. Thus, in course of time through the evolution of social and cultural life many gods and goddesses had appeared in the religious fold in the Classical age. Elaborate rituals and ceremonies had also developed and found proper representation in contemporary coins and inscriptions.

Like other ancient rulers the Gupta emperors were highly religious in their daily life and in fact under their steady patronage Hinduism got a new lease of life. From innumerable epigraphic records, we learn that temples and Brāhmaṇas, and Buddhist and Jain monasteries were liberally endowed with land and money by the emperors, queens, ministers, royal officials, guilds and wealthy citizen for their own religious merit and for that of their predecessors and successors. Numerous Gupta coins throw light on the religious thinking and practice of the Gupta emperors. Our ancient thinkers have recommended four stages or *āsramas* of life such as *brāhmacharya*, *gārhastha*, *vānaprastha* and *sannyās*. According to this system one should lead an austere life as a student at his teacher's residence, as a married householder, as a hermit and lastly as a wandering monk with all his earthly ties broken. The ultimate goal of life is, however, to attain *moksha* (or liberation). It was considered the ideal scheme of life. From time to time at least some of the emperors tried to follow the above scheme of life which was reflected on their respective coins. In boyhood and in youth the education and training of the royal princes were very well taken care of by their fathers and grandfathers. Thus, we have an able set of rulers and conquerors among the early Gupta emperors. In later life they attached equal importance to their family life,—as an house-holder whose dutifulness was the source of *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokshya*. Thus, a very happy married life is reflected on a good number of the Gupta coins. Besides, great political significance the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type of gold coins has great social and religious value in the life of Chandragupta I.

The King-queen-on-couch type of gold coins may be grouped as the "family coins" of Chandragupta II. On the obverse of the coin the Garuḍa standard is visible and on the reverse the king is shown dressed in *dhoti* and not in his usual royal dress. The queen is dressed in *śārḍi* and *bodice*. The couple are shown facing each other and sitting on the couch. Both of them are wearing jewelleries and are looking

very graceful. Chandragupta II offers a *sinduradāni* to his beloved queen in a relaxed and homely atmosphere. Kumāragupta I was an ideal lover and husband. His coins bear a touch of romanticism. On the obverse of the King and the queen type of gold coins Kumāragupta I is seen offering a bunch of flowers to his queen.

The Gupta monarchs recognised the importance of the presence of their queen in their great religious ceremonies. Only the chief queen (Mahādevī) was allowed to play the part of Hotri (worshipper) along with her husband in the Aśvamedha sacrifice. The Aśvamedha type of gold coins of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I testify to the above facts. The queen of the emperor was also crowned with certain titles of honour.

Not only the queen, but also perhaps, the queen-mother had an important role to play in the family and public life of the prince and emperor. Some evidences in this respect is furnished which have been identified by A.S. Altekar as the King and Lakshmī type of gold coins issued by Skandagupta. Altekar's identification is not without doubts and Skandagupta possibly issued those coins to commemorate his victory over the Hūṇas and the Pushyamitras in the closing years of the reign of his father or the early year of his reign. The female figures on both the obverse and reverse of the above coins have been identified by Altekar as Lakshmī. The identification of Lakshmī on the reverse of the coins is quite reasonable. As usual the goddess, nimbate, is seated on a lotus and she holds a noose in her right hand and lotus in left. But on the obverse the female figures is not nimbate and she holds no noose or cornucopiae. She is standing before Skandagupta in usual dress with a lotus flower in one hand and in the other hand she holds "some other object" as a sort of blessing for her son who is about to start his march against the Hūasṇ and the Pushyamitras. The Garuḍa standard in the centre, the bow and arrow in the king's hand and his military attire

suggests his impending departure for the battle field. It is something unusual that on both the sides the female figures are the same (i.e. Lakshmī). According to the Hindu tradition it would be better to identify the figure on the obverse with the queen mother and this type of coins should be known as "the Queen-Mother and the King" type instead of king and Lakshmī. But a point arises here. Nowhere in the inscriptions of Skandagupta has the name of his mother been mentioned. This has led some scholars to think that he was probably an illegitimate child of Kumāragupta I. Keeping this view in mind it should appear highly irregular that Skandagupta would allow the portrait of his mother to be stamped on his coins and not mention her when giving a detailed account of his genealogy.

The third stage of the ideal life was *vānaprastha*. Normally after fulfilling all his duties and responsibilities in private and public life and at the retiring age perhaps Kumāragupta I preferred to renounce the world and the whole scene has been beautifully represented by his "Apratigha" type of gold coins. There are three figures on the coin. Although their significance is not yet fully solved, Prof. A.S. Altekar has given some tentative suggestions. The central figure is undoubtedly Kumāragupta I since he is expressly described as such. The lady on the right may be his queen and the soldier on the left his general or the crown prince. Both of them are expostulating with him. Can it be that the emperor is contemplating renunciation and that his queen and general or crown prince are trying to dissuade him without success ? The folded hands on the chest of the emperor may indicate his inability to accept their arguments. He is firm in his resolution and is, therefore, described on the reverse as Apratigha (or invincible).

The "Summum-bonum" of Hindu life was also expressed by the emperors on their coins. After discharging the duties of a house-holder and performing penance and austerities in

vānaprastha one likes to attain heaven. It is the blessed end of Hindu life and it was desired by every Gupta ruler. We can refer to a few instances from the Gupta coins. The obverse of the standard type of gold coins of Samudragupta runs thus—"*Samara-Sata-vitata-vijayo-jita-ripurajita-divam-jayati*" —the invincible (king) who has won victories on a hundred battle fields and conquered enemies, wins the heaven. Again, in the Kācha coin "*Kācho-gamavajitya-divam-karmabhir-uttamair-jayati*"—having conquered the earth Kācha wins the heaven by excellent deeds. Considerable emphasis used to be laid on good deeds of men, thus, even the king who was a lion among men having conquered the earth wins heaven by good deeds,—"*Gamavajitya-Sucaritaih-divam-jayati*". The substance of some of the legends on coins express and confirm the well known Indian idea that by the merit acquired by sacrifice one may become equal to the gods or become an Indra and attain to heaven. According to the "Satapatha Brāhmaṇa", the world of heaven is said to be the reward of the sacrificer. The means by which heaven is attained are sometimes specifically expressed by such phrases as *karmabhiruttamaih* or *sucharitaih.*

The achievements of the Gupta emperors must be remembered for the great reformation of the Hindu society and religion. The conceptual evolution of gods and goddesses along with different religious practices can be studied from their coins. In this connection we must note that the importance of the kings is predominant as compared with that of their queens in the Gupta coins. But strangely enough the goddesses are more in number than their male counterpart. From a careful study of the coins, inscriptions and seals we come to know that Vishṇu and Lakshmī were their favourite god and goddess. Śrī R. D. Banerjee, thus, remarks, "they are distinctly Vaishṇavas." In their large number of coins and inscriptions the Gupta emperors assumed the title of *Parama-bhāgavata.* They also used Garuḍa seals, Garuḍa standard and Garuḍa in their coins. Garuḍa was the vehicle of Vishṇu

and Lakshmī was the consort of Vishṇu. Specially Lakshmī the goddess of fortune with lotus flower in one hand or cornucopiae in another hand is very commonly visible on the coins from Samudragupta to Vishṇugupta. Thus, Lord Vishṇu was perhaps worshipped by the emperors for strength, vitality and energy and his consort Lakshmī was worshipped for wealth and fortune. A circular wheel apparently the Vishṇu-Chakra is also visible in some of their coins. In the Chakra-Vikrama gold coins Vishṇu himself offers three circular objects, most probably, sweet-meats to Chandragupta II who was a great devotee of Vishṇu. He also created Garuḍa-*dhvaja* at the famous *tīrtha* of Vishṇpada somewhere on the Beas in the Punjab. He, thus, claimed to have received direct favour from his favourite deity and for this special favours he became invincible in warfare.

Lakshmī, the goddess of fortune, is seen sometimes seated on throne or on a lotus with a cornucopiae signifies the horn of plenty that is the Gupta empire would be "over flowed with flowers, fruits and corns". Sometimes, she simply holds a lotus flower in her left hand as a mark of her divine blessing on her devotee. But almost everywhere attached to her right can be seen a noose. Thus, the goddess of fortune, it will seem, wants to maintain a permanent tie with the Gupta rulers. Sometimes, Lakshmī is seen scattering wealth and fortune in the form of coins. She is also fond of feeding a peacock from a bunch of fruits. She always appears in a *sarḍi* and *bodice* which indicate a cordial and informal relationship between her and her devotee. Her figure appears graceful and her demeanor calm and mother-like from the reverse of the Standard, Archer, Battle-axe, Lyrist types of gold coins of Samudra gupta ; Kācha gold coins ; Archer, Horseman, Chhatra, Couch, Standard, Chakra-Vikrama type of gold coins of Chandragupta II ; Archer, Horseman, Swordsman, Elephant-rider, Elephant-rider-lion-slayer, Chhatra, Apratigha type of gold coins of Kumāra-gupta I ; Archer, King and Lakshmī (or Queen Mother), Chhatra, Horseman type of gold coins of Skandagupta and the gold coins of Narasiṃhagupta and Vishṇugupta.

Besides Vishṇu and Lakshmī, the emperors also worshipped many other gods and goddesses. The effigy of Ambikā (or Durgā) seated on a lion is also seen from the gold coins of Chandragupta Kumāradevi type, Lion slayer coins of Chandragupta II, Lion slayer and king-queen type of coins of Kumāragupta I. She is the same as *Siṃharathi* or *Siṃhavahini* of our Epic and Purāṇic literature. Another female deity worshipped by the Gupta emperors was the *Makaravahini* Gaṅgā. She is on the obverse of the Tiger-slayer coins of Samudragupta and Rhinoceros slayer coins of Kumāragupta I. The river goddesses Gaṅgā and Jamunā were well known in the Gupta art. Śiva was also worshipped by the Gupta rulers. He is represented by his Trisula (Trident) on the reverse of the silver coins of Kumāragupta I and Nandi (Bull) on the reverse of the silver coins of Skandagupta. Kumāragupta I was named after Kumāra or Kārtikeya. The Kārtikeya and the peacock type of gold coins were intended to pay special homage to Kārtikeya. In some of his silver coins also, the peacock, the emblem of the deity is present.

The rituals and ceremonies as a part of their refined culture were expressed through their coins. After completing his conquests Samudragupta performed the Aśvamedha sacrifice which was long in abeyance after the reign of Pushyamitra Suṅga. A special type of Aśvamedha coins were issued by him to commemorate this event and for giving fees (or *dakshiṇā*) for participating priests and others. The ritualistic injunctions prescribe the distribution of fabulous sums of money on these occasions. His Aśvamedha type of gold coins prove beyond doubt that he had performed at least one sacrifice. The reverse legend is *Śrī-aśvamedhamahendra*.

Along with the social development the position of women had greatly improved. They had a fair share of culture and education. Some of them were even very good administrator. For instance, the Vākāṭaka queen Pravābatīguptā ruled the empire for nearly a quarter of a century. The marriage

ceremony of Mahārājādhirāja Chandragupta I and Lichchhavi princess Kumāradevī is also represented by the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type of gold coins. On the obverse of the coins Chandragupta I is offering an object presumably the marriage ring to his queen. His son Samudragupta was proud of his Lichchhavi relation and described himself as the Lichchhavi *dauhitra*. These give rise to the assumption that the matrimonial relation with the Lichchhavis materially contributed to the political greatness of the Guptas.

Many of the Gupta monarchs had more than one wife. But only the *Pradhānā Mahisi* (or the chief queen) of the emperor played a very significant role in the religious and social life of the emperor. On the reverse design of the Aśvamedha type of gold coins Dattadevi is holding a chowrie over her right shoulder and on the left field there is a sacrificial post. Mahādevī Anantadevī is also seen on the Aśvamedha type of gold coins of Kumāragupta I. On the obverse of Aśvamedha type of gold coins of Samudragupta and his grand son Kumāragupta I a horse is standing before a decorated *yupa* (sacrificial post) enclosed within a platform. There is "*Śrī*" (or *Siddhaṃ*) beneath the horse. On the reverse of the coins the chief queen is holding a chowrie (*chāmara*) over her right shoulder and a piece of cloth in her hand. There is an object in front of her which resembles a spear. According to the Kātayana Sauta sutra the Mahādevī is required to fan and wash the horse and then clean the animal with towel. The spear like object is actually a needle (*suchi*). It is stated in the same *Śāstra* that there should be three needles of gold, silver and copper. After the horse is sacrificed the three queens of the king are to puncture its body by needles in order to facilitate the passage of the sword by the emperor into its body. The Mahādevī is to use the gold needle, the favourite one the silver and the discarded one the copper.

The Gupta emperors might have celebrated their special marriage anniversaries by minting coins. We may cite two

such examples here. On one occasion Chandragupta II offers an object, apparently a *Sinduradāni* as identified by A. S. Altekar to his favourite queen. Both of them are in informal dress, sitting face to face on couch. It is beautifully presented in his King and queen type of gold coins. In the similar manner Kumāragupta I is shown offering Anantadevī a bunch of flowers. These coins also indicate a very peaceful family life of the Gupta emperors. The attachment of the royal couple is revealed through the lyrist type of coins of Kumāragupta I which shows the king deeply absorbed in playing with his lyre and his queen listening to the music sitting by his side with a flower in her hand.

The Gupta coins also reflect the material culture of the emperors. Some of them were interested in instrumental music. Samudragupta is seen on his gold coins paying a lyre. He is dressed only upto his waist. The other favourite pastime of the Gupta emperors was hunting and a great many hunting scenes were depicted on coins. They attacked the animals from horse back, elephant and on foot. The Archer type of coins depicts the scene of hunting excursions (or *mrigayā*) with bow and arrow. Some coins also express the royal love for birds. The peacock type of gold coins of Kumāragupta I shows the king feeding fruits to the peacock. The refined taste of the emperors is expressed through the fine selection of their furnitures and costumes. There are different varieties of the thrones, bed-stead, *morḍha*, umbrella, fly-whisk, stools, foot-tools and spittoon. Their decorative designs speak highly of the art of carpentry.

So far as the exchange value of the Gupta currency was concerned, by spending 2, 3 or 4 *dīnāras* one could purchase one *kulyavāpa* of land which amounted to a large area. Moreover by depositing 10 and 12 *dīnāras* benefactors expected to maintain an almshouse as long as the sun, the moon and the stars endured out of the interests of the sum. All these references undoubtedly show that the gold coins had a very

high purchasing power. They were not likely to be used in small transactions.

There was a remarkable development of Sanskrit in the Gupta age. The Gupta emperors were first to start the practice of giving the coin legends in beautiful material lines. Notable among them are the following :

> Prithivītalāmbaraśaśi Kumāra Gupto jayatyajitah
> Jayati nriposibhirajitah.
>
> Prithivītalaśvarendrah Kumāragupto jayatyajitah
> Bhartā Khadgatrātā Kumāragupto jayatyaniśam.

These lines would show that the poets of the Gupta age were particularly fond of using figures of speech like *upamā*, *utpreksha*, *ślesha*, etc.

The splendid gold coinage of the Guptas with its many types and varieties are the finest examples of Indian art. Slight traces of Hellenic influence can be noticed from the effigies of the kings on almost all of the Gupta gold coins. Just like the Kushāṇas and Indo-Greeks everywhere the king wears a close fitting cap, coat and trousers. But in Indian manner they have earrings, necklace, ring, armlet, etc. along with other India objects, such as, Garuḍa standard, peacock and so on. The figure of the queens of the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī, the Aśvamedha coins of Samudragupta and Kumāragupta I and the different figures of goddesses on coins are purely Indian in origin and style. They are in loose robe, earrings, necklace, armlets etc. In most of the Gupta gold coins the king is exhibited with masculine figures with arms and ammunitions which are the predominant signs of ancient life and culture. On some coins they are about to kill a tiger, lion and rhinoceros. Only in certain types of coins such as the Chandragupta-Kumāradevī, Lyrist type of coins of Skandagupta, Chakravikrama coins of Chandragupta II, Peacock coins of Kumāragupta I the king has appeared before us in

the most sober and fashionable colour. Again the high-sounding title used by the kings on their coins also reflect the power and magnificance of the Gupta sovereigns to a certain extent.

The splendid Gupta coinage with its many types and infinite varieties and its inscription in Classical Sanskrit are the finest examples of ancient Indian art. As specimens of art they are the best and have hardly any parallel in any other numismatic series. A comparison is usually made of Gupta coins with the Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian coinage. But the latter series represents a tradition of numismatic art that was foreign to India. This foreign tradition was gradually absorbed and assimilated by the Indian mint masters.

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,, Bhitargoan. 1908-09.
Excavations at Pāṇḍu Rājār Dipi, Berachāpā and Rañgamāti, Etc. in West Bengal.

INDEX



23/10/78

Gupta period - India - Cultural history

Cultural history - India - Gupta period

India - Cultural history - Gupta period